

# *The* AGRICULTURAL HISTORY REVIEW



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\*

## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

Agricultural Changes in the Chilterns, 1875-1900  
by J. T. COPPOCK

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Lancashire Livestock Farming during the Great Depression  
by T. W. FLETCHER

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East Yorkshire's Agricultural Labour Force in the mid-Nineteenth Century  
by JUNE A. SHEPPARD

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# Agricultural Changes in the Chilterns

1875-1900<sup>1</sup>

By J. T. COPPOCK

WHILE the broad outlines of the agricultural depression which affected British agriculture from the late 1870's until the end of the century are well known, few local studies have been made. The Chilterns and the adjoining clay lowlands (Fig. 1) provide a suitable area for investigating the changes which occurred, for they contain a wide variety of country within a small compass. The Chilterns themselves, rising to over 800 feet, have stony soils of low fertility, the clay lowlands to north and south are poorly drained and difficult to cultivate, while the gravel terraces of the Thames and the Icknield belt below the escarpment have free-working loams which make good arable soils.

In the 1870's the Chilterns were primarily rural. It is true that many of the towns were growing rapidly, but they were still small, and most of the land, though much interrupted by blocks of woodland, was used for agriculture. In those parts nearest London there were also numerous parks and mansions. The clay vales to the north, where there were few parks and little wood, were almost entirely farmed, but south of the Chilterns parks were again numerous. There were marked regional differences in the kind of farming practised, differences of fairly long standing, determined mainly by soil and by nearness to London markets. The easily worked loams of the Icknield belt and the Thames terraces were almost entirely arable, as were the Chilterns, where the only extensive stretches of grass lay in the landscaped parks or along the few streams. The amount of grass decreased with elevation; a typical farm at Swyncombe, for example, had only 7 out of 372 acres under grass. On the clays to the north, more land was under permanent grass, though the proportion varied from all-grass farms in the low-lying Vale of Aylesbury to mixed farms with a preponderance of arable around Bletchley. Generally between one and two-fifths of the land was under the plough, and a farm at Waterstock, with 208 acres of grass and 118 of arable,

<sup>1</sup> The cost of extracting the statistical data on which this paper is based was met by a grant from the Central Research Fund, University of London. The author is grateful to Mr J. Bryant who drew the maps. Statements which are not supported by references are either derived from the parish summaries of the agricultural returns (which have been extensively used in the preparation of this paper) or generalizations made from sources too numerous to list.

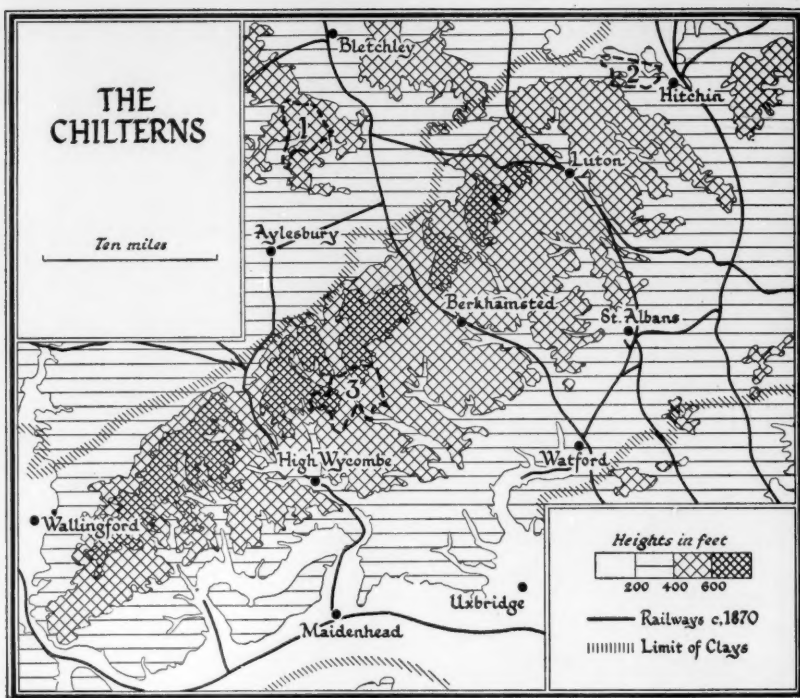


FIG. I

was fairly representative.<sup>1</sup> The clays of south Hertfordshire and Middlesex were nearly all under permanent grass, but the reason for this was only partly the heavy soil. London, with its large population of horses and dairy cattle, made heavy demands on the adjacent counties for hay, straw, and other fodder crops, and four-fifths of the grass was cut for hay each year (Figure IIa).

The stock kept and the crops grown also varied considerably. On the Chilterns and in all the main arable areas, the Norfolk four-course rotation, or some variant of it, prevailed (Figure IIb). Cereals, turnips, and clover accounted for four-fifths of the arable, the remainder being occupied by other fodder crops such as peas and vetches. On Hoo Farm, Kimpton, for example, there were in 1870 113 acres of wheat, 88½ of barley, 73 of clover, 20 of beans, and 99½ of turnips.<sup>2</sup> The better land supported an additional

<sup>1</sup> *Second Report, Commissioners on the Employment of Children, Young Persons, and Women in Agriculture*, Appendix, Part II, Parliamentary Papers, XIII, 1868-9, p. 326.

<sup>2</sup> Accounts, Hoo Farm, Kimpton, Hertfordshire Record Office.



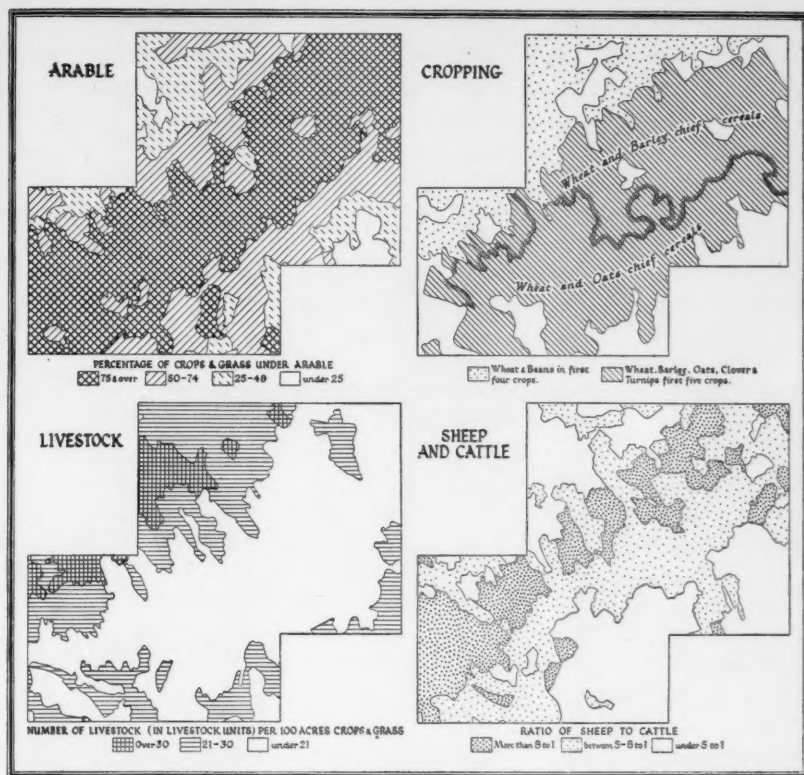


FIG. II

corn crop and usually carried more wheat and barley than oats. Thus, in the Hertfordshire Chilterns, where soils were generally better than further west, a five-course rotation was common and wheat and barley were the leading cereals;<sup>1</sup> in the poorer Oxfordshire Chilterns, a four-course rotation, with oats the second cereal, was general. On the clays, cropping was more varied, and rotations often longer.<sup>2</sup> Wheat was everywhere the chief crop, occupying a third or more of the arable. Beans were also a characteristic crop, and a larger proportion of land was bare-fallowed; but some oats, barley,

<sup>1</sup> H. Evershed, 'Agriculture of Hertfordshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, xxv, 1864, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> *Second Report on the Employment of Children, etc., loc. cit.*, p. 75; *ibid.*, *First Report*, Appendix, Part I, Parliamentary Papers, xvii, 1867-8, p. 124.

clover, and turnips were also grown. On Manor Farm, Upper Stondon, wheat, occupying 99 acres, and beans, 52 acres, were the leading crops in 1868, the remainder of the arable being occupied chiefly by 50 acres of clover, 37 of turnips, 24 of barley, 22 of oats, and 18 acres of fallow.<sup>1</sup> On the little arable on the clays to the south of the Chilterns, wheat was again the leading crop.

Specialized cropping was rare. Market gardening was important only on the Middlesex gravel terraces and potatoes were grown only in small quantities, except in the market-gardening areas and on the sandy soils around Leighton Buzzard. Wheat and barley were the principal cash crops; on one Hertfordshire farm they accounted for 84 per cent of crop sales.<sup>2</sup> Within easy reach of London, however, oats, hay, roots, and straw were sold; the importance of oats in south Hertfordshire was probably due to the demand for oats and oat straw rather than to the quality of the soil.

Most observers noted the considerable uniformity of cropping on farms, particularly in the Chilterns, and their impressions are supported by the agricultural returns. To what extent this uniformity was due to lease restrictions it is impossible to say; clauses in leases ranged from general injunctions to cultivate the land in a husband-like manner to specific instructions to follow a particular rotation, as on a farm at Mapledurham, where the farmer was enjoined to cultivate the land on a four-course system and was forbidden to take two crops of the same kind of grain in succession or to crop more than half the land with grain.<sup>3</sup> There were limitations on growing other crops; a tenant of a 640-acre farm on the Ashridge estate was prohibited from growing more than two acres of potatoes.<sup>4</sup> There were also restrictions on the disposal of hay, straw, and roots grown on the farm. It is true that such restrictive covenants were not necessarily enforced and practice seems to have varied from estate to estate; only one specific example of the enforcement has been noted, where a tenant on a farm at Chenies was ordered to plough up and fallow a field sown to oats because of "too great a liberty in the extent of his White-Strawed Cropping."<sup>5</sup> The object of the covenants was, of course, to protect the land, and farmers were usually allowed to sell crops, hay, and straw when sufficient dung could be brought back to replace their manurial value.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of livestock varied inversely with the proportion of

<sup>1</sup> Bedfordshire County Record Office, DDX 159/3.

<sup>2</sup> 'Remarks concerning a Herts Farm', *Herts Illustrated Review*, 1, 1893, pp. 647-8.

<sup>3</sup> Agreement, April 1883, Blount MSS., Bodleian.

<sup>4</sup> Hertfordshire County Record Office, Leases, Ashridge Estate.

<sup>5</sup> Bedford Office, Bedford Estate Reports, 1887.

<sup>6</sup> Evershed, *loc. cit.*, p. 284.

arable,<sup>1</sup> except on the clays to the south of the Chilterns where the hay crop severely limited grazing (Figure IIc). On the Icknield belt and on the Chilterns sheep were the principal livestock, especially on the higher parts where water was scarce. They were arable sheep, folded on roots, and were kept primarily to manure the soil. Horses accounted for one third of the total livestock, and a few dairy cattle, beef cattle, and stores were also kept. Stocking on these farms is exemplified by Hoo Farm, Kimpton, which carried 702 sheep, of which 408 were breeding ewes, 32 cattle, 23 horses, and 75 pigs. Lower down the Chilterns, where water was more abundant, fewer sheep and more cattle were kept (Figure IIId). South of the Chilterns farms kept mainly cattle, and nearer London some dairying was practised. The chief areas of livestock farming were, however, the clay lowlands to the north, especially the area around Aylesbury, which Read had called "the pastoral garden of the county."<sup>2</sup> Cattle were the chief livestock, but both arable and grass sheep were kept. The mainly grass farms near Aylesbury fattened beef cattle, particularly Herefords, but the mixed farms, which covered most of the clays, practised dairying and rearing as well as fattening. Dairying was typical of the poorer grassland and was still largely concerned with butter production; only in well-placed areas was much milk sold.<sup>3</sup>

Stocking, too, was affected by lease restrictions, though less frequently than the use of the arable land. Some leases merely enjoined the farmer to stock the farm adequately; but occasionally restrictions were more specific, as on Park and Rose Farms, Mapledurham, where the tenant was required to keep a sufficient flock of sheep and to pen and fold them on the farm.<sup>4</sup>

This brief statistical account inevitably minimizes the rich variety of farming; nevertheless, the prevailing impression is one of considerable uniformity within regions which differed markedly from each other.

In the late 1870's a series of bad harvests coincided with a period of falling prices. Although the weather improved, grain prices, particularly of wheat and barley, continued to fall; they were joined in the 1880's by a similar, though smaller, fall in the prices of livestock and livestock products. These falling prices were met in two main ways; part of the burden was shouldered by landlords, who remitted and later reduced rents, and part by farmers, who

<sup>1</sup> No winter returns of livestock were made, but there is evidence of fattening of cattle in winter in the arable areas.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Read, 'Report on the Farming of Buckinghamshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, xvi, 1855, p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Morton, 'Dairy Farming', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, 2nd Series, xiv, 1878, p. 689, and report of Daily News Special Commissioner, reproduced in *Bedford Times*, 13 September 1879.

<sup>4</sup> Agreement, April 1883, Blount MSS.

attempted to reduce their losses by farming less intensively, by avoiding expensive cultivations, and by concentrating on those products which were least affected by the fall in prices. But none of these remedies was adopted uniformly over the whole area.

The reductions in rents are the best documented of the changes and were almost universal. At first landowners granted temporary remissions; in 1880 for example, the duke of Bedford allowed 25 per cent off the year's rent to all tenants on the estate.<sup>1</sup> But gradually, as it became clear that this was not a temporary recession, there were permanent reductions. These were made necessary both to retain existing tenants and to attract new, and it was said that in parts of Hertfordshire no rent at all was paid, the landowners being glad merely to keep a tenant on the farm.<sup>2</sup> There was often a succession of reductions; the rent of Flint Hall Farm on the West Wycombe estate, for example, was reduced by £30 in 1882 and by a further £40 in 1886. Revenues from rents fell steadily; on the West Wycombe estate the rental fell by 19 per cent between 1876 and 1888,<sup>3</sup> and on the Bedford estates in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire average farm rent fell by 48 per cent between 1876 and 1895.<sup>4</sup> Reductions were most marked on heavy arable clays, which were expensive and difficult to work, and on poor soils which gave a low return; on the thin soils of the Oxfordshire Chilterns, for example, rents fell by 50 per cent between 1880 and 1893.<sup>5</sup> On good grassland, or where there was easy access to a market, reductions were much less; in the Vale of Aylesbury reductions were generally 20–25 per cent, and near the railways south of the Chilterns from 10–25 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

The most general of the agricultural adjustments was an extension of the grass acreage (Figures IIIa and b). Since wages changed little, labour costs, the largest single item in the outgoings of the arable farmer, could be reduced only by curtailing expensive cultivations. It is difficult to be sure how much land was laid to grass. The agricultural returns show a progressive increase in the amount of permanent pasture; and while this may be due in part to a more complete enumeration of the smaller holdings, which would tend to be largely grass, there is no reason to suppose that it does not reflect an actual

<sup>1</sup> Bedford Estate Reports, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture, Reports of Assistant Commissioners*, Parliamentary Papers, xvi, 1881, p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> Rentals, West Wycombe Estate papers.

<sup>4</sup> Duke of Bedford, *The Story of a Great Agricultural Estate*, London, 1897, p. 224.

<sup>5</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture, Minutes of Evidence*, Parliamentary Papers, xvi, Pt. I, 1894, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture, Report of A. Spencer on the Vale of Aylesbury and the County of Hertford*, Parliamentary Papers, xvi, 1895, p. 17.

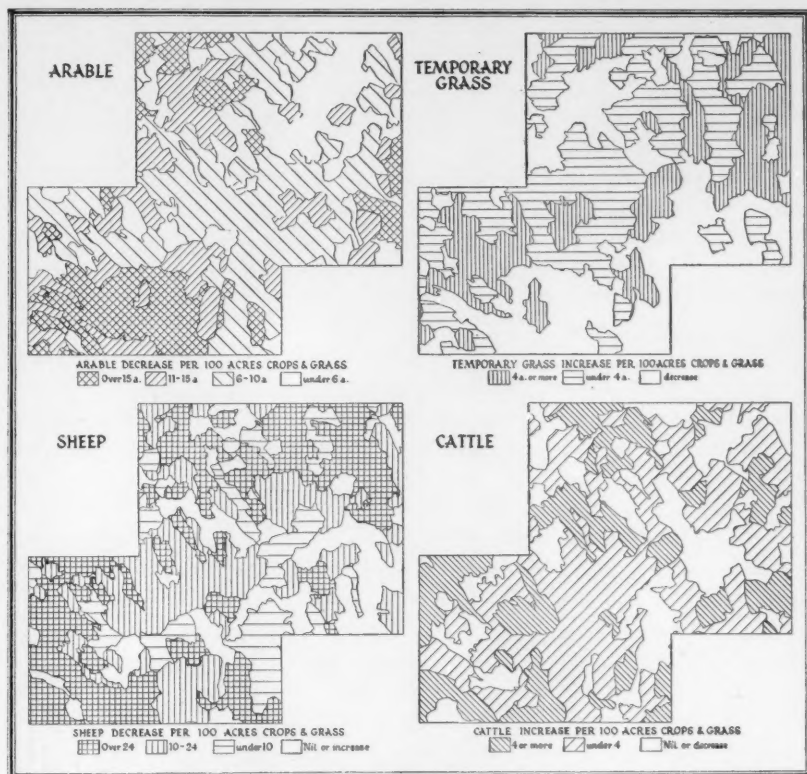


FIG. III

trend. Naturally the permanence of price reductions was not appreciated at first and many farmers simply left leys down for more than one year; these would be returned as temporary grass, and only later would they be regarded as permanent. It is true that the assistant commissioner who reported on Bedfordshire in 1895 thought that the amount of permanent grass was being overestimated and that of temporary grass underestimated;<sup>1</sup> but the returns themselves suggest that an expanded temporary grass acreage often concealed the extent of the conversion of arable to permanent pasture. His observation that fields were allowed to lie in grass for a number of years with the intention of ploughing them when prices improved is probably correct;

<sup>1</sup> *Report of H. Pringle on the Counties of Bedford, Huntingdon, and Northampton, Parliamentary Papers, XVII, 1895, p. 41.*



but prices did not improve, and the fields remained in grass. The point at which such leys should be regarded as permanent is in any case debatable; cropping records on a number of farms on the Panshanger estate show fields which, having been under a ley for two or three years, are recorded in the succeeding year as pasture.<sup>1</sup>

Farmers increased their acreage under grass in a number of ways; by sowing more temporary grass and allowing it to stay down longer, by laying down arable to permanent pasture, and by abandoning arable to colonization by self-sown grasses and weeds. The contribution made by each varied in importance in different parts of the area. The proportion of the arable occupied by leys increased nearly everywhere, and in the Chilterns the increases were on such a scale that, despite the diminishing arable, the acreage of temporary grass expanded (Figure IIIb). The Chilterns were said to be unsuited to permanent grass, though they could support leys of up to three years.<sup>2</sup> But these leys were left down and subsequently recognized as permanent pasture; in 1901 Rider Haggard noted that most of the grass in the Oxfordshire Chilterns was originally seeded as two- or three-year leys.<sup>3</sup> On the clays the increase in temporary grass was often ephemeral, and after bad seasons had passed the acreage was reduced (Figure V, Stewkley).

On better land, particularly the claylands where mixed farming was practised and the establishment of good grass was known to be possible, land was intentionally laid down as permanent grass, either directly or under a nurse crop. But "it is a very expensive luxury;" the seeds alone cost 30s. an acre, and the duke of Bedford estimated the total cost at £15 an acre.<sup>4</sup> It is likely to have been widespread, therefore, only on the estates of wealthy landowners. The duke himself laid down 1,308 acres on the 28,274 acres of his Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire estates between 1880 and 1897. The landowner usually provided the seeds and the tenant the labour; in 1880, for example, two arable fields on stiff clay at Hill Farm, Potsgrove, were laid down to permanent pasture, the duke of Bedford providing the seeds on condition that the fields were not again ploughed up.<sup>5</sup> The farmer himself sometimes provided both seeds and labour, though he had frequently to obtain the landowner's consent first. In general, once the fields were laid down to permanent grass they were subject to the same prohibitions on ploughing up as the existing grass; a lease on a Datchworth farm stated that the tenant was not

<sup>1</sup> Panshanger Estate Papers, Hertfordshire County Record Office.

<sup>2</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture, Minutes of Evidence*, 1894, *loc. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, London, 1902, II, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture, Minutes of Evidence*, Parliamentary Papers, xvii, 1881, 618, and Duke of Bedford, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> Bedford Estate Report, 1880.



to break up fields which at the determination of the tenancy should have been under seeds for six years.<sup>1</sup> Increases in permanent grass were widespread, particularly on the clays, and in the Oxfordshire Chilterns and in north-east Berkshire (though here accessibility to markets rather than the nature of the soil was the important consideration).

Much was made by contemporaries of the abandonment of cultivated land and of fields that "tumbled down to grass." Agricultural historians have perhaps been too influenced by the "terrible map, dotted thick with black patches" (Clapham's phrase) which accompanied Pringle's report on Essex in 1893. But there is no evidence that abandonment was widespread here; a return in 1881 of abandoned farms and fields in Buckinghamshire, for example, gave a total of 1,102 acres, out of 403,673 acres of agricultural land.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that abandoned land might escape enumeration (though there was no fall in the total acreage returned); but Pringle himself could find none in Bedfordshire. Some of the farms on owners' hands through lack of tenants may well have been neglected; land on such farms at Wallington and Bygrave was said to be almost out of cultivation.<sup>3</sup> But even the extent of land on landowners' hands seems to have been exaggerated. Although one witness reported, at second hand, that on Lord Camoys's estate in the Oxfordshire Chilterns only two out of thirty tenants remained in 1882, this area seems to have been exceptional.<sup>4</sup> Spencer suggested in 1895 that rather more than 20 per cent of the cultivated area was in hand in Hertfordshire, and agricultural returns for 1887 of the acreage of land farmed by owners suggest that over most of the area the proportion was even smaller.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, farms were sometimes taken in hand to prevent the land being neglected by tenants who had lost heart or resources. This seems to have been the practice on the Bedford estate. What is clear is that standards of farming fell. Lord Macclesfield's agent said in 1892 that he did not know a parish where the land was being well farmed, and that he had just taken over one farm without a clean acre.<sup>6</sup> A bad season might lead to temporary abandonment; this is suggested by the laconic entry "thistles" in the cropping record of one farm in 1880.<sup>7</sup> The increase in the acreage of bare fallow, particularly in the Chilterns (Figure IVc), may also conceal such temporary neglect. Fields did tumble

<sup>1</sup> Hertfordshire County Record Office, Abel Smith Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Manuscript figures, parish summaries 1881, Ministry of Agriculture.

<sup>3</sup> Spencer, *loc. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture, Minutes of Evidence*, 1881, *loc. cit.*, p. 847.

<sup>5</sup> Spencer, *loc. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour, Report upon the Poor Law Union of Thame*, Parliamentary Papers, XXXV, 1893-4, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Panshanger Papers, Digswell Lodge Farm.

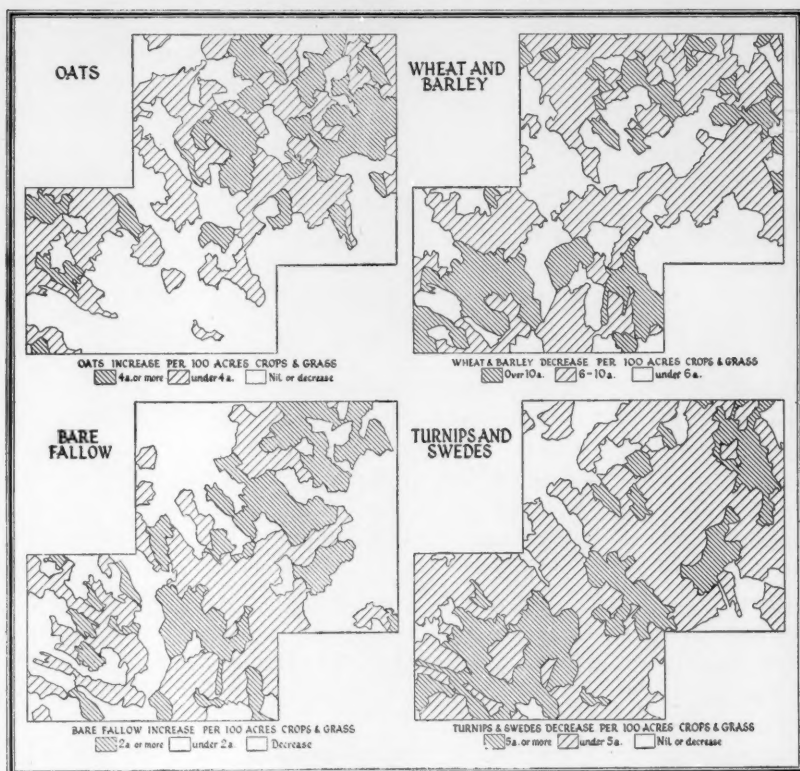


FIG. IV

down to grass; one such field is recorded on Great Green Street Farm at Chenies in 1887, where the land became covered with couch and weeds which provided only poor herbage. Self-sown grass was auctioned annually in Bedfordshire and was let at very low rents;<sup>1</sup> but even here the extent was exaggerated and an observer who had been told that a good deal of land around Toddington was "laying itself down with twitch" found the fields fairly clean.<sup>2</sup> It seems likely that in so far as self-sown grass was widespread, it was to be found chiefly on poor arable clays and on very light land.

In whatever way land was converted to grass there was everywhere a reduction in the tillage acreage. The fall was least on the free-working loams

<sup>1</sup> Pringle, *loc. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Commission on Labour, *Report upon the Poor Law Union of Woburn*, Parliamentary Papers, xxxv, 1, 1893-4, p. 18.

at the foot of the escarpment, and on the predominantly pastoral clays around Aylesbury and in south Hertfordshire, where the need and scope for additional grass were limited. It was greatest on mixed farms on the clays and on the steep slopes and stony soils of the western Chilterns, especially in Oxfordshire. Three sample parishes show the range of variation, Stewkley (Bucks.) representing the heavy clays, Pirton (Herts.) the Icknield belt, and Great Missenden (Bucks.) the Chilterns (Figure V). That they are fairly typical of

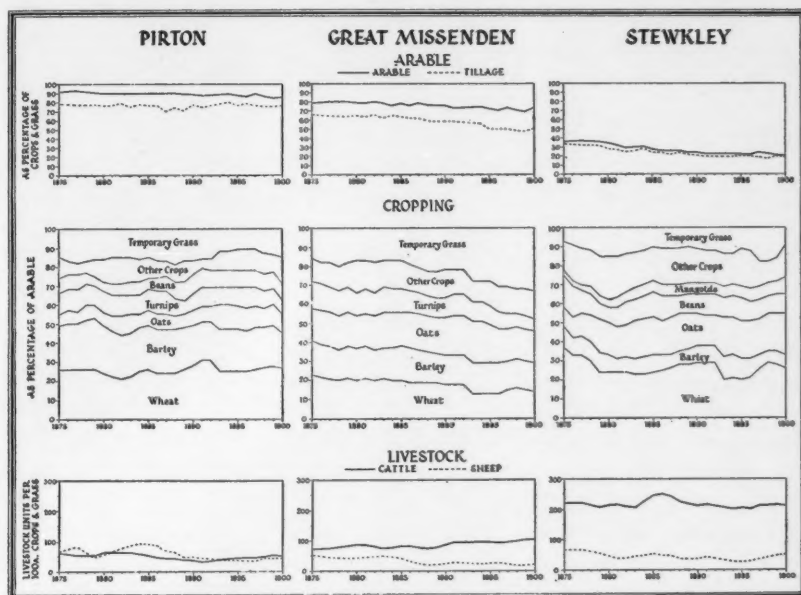


FIG. V

the areas in which they lie is confirmed by the maps in Figures III and IV.

Of course, these averages conceal considerable variation between different farms. It is possible to find farms which delayed conversion of arable until the 1900's. Furthermore, the process on any one farm was not as continuous as the graphs suggest; fields would be laid down at intervals between which the arable acreage was constant. A change in tenancy was frequently the occasion for an increase in the grass acreage since it was hard to find good tenants for arable farms on indifferent or heavy soils. Thus, on the 260 acres of Lodge Farm, Chenies, 81 acres were laid down to grass for a new tenant in 1884. The change in emphasis is well seen in a sale catalogue for the War-

grave Manor Estate, which, though largely arable in 1876, was advertised in 1896 as being mainly grass and having only 100 acres of arable, and that of high quality.<sup>1</sup> The great majority of farms increased their grass acreage between 1878 and 1900, and although the sequence of events and the proportion of arable converted to grass varied from farm to farm, there seems to be no doubt that the picture of steady conversion was true of the farms of any area as a whole.

In so far as it was deliberate, this increase in the grass acreage was effected primarily to reduce labour costs; but it was generally accompanied by changes in the stocking of farms. With less arable fewer sheep were needed to fertilize the land, and numbers fell, particularly where sheep had been most numerous, on the High Chilterns, below the escarpment, and in the clay vales (Figure IIIc). There was a corresponding increase in the number of both store and dairy cattle, save in the areas which remained largely arable (Figure IIId). In favoured parts, such as south Oxfordshire, the numbers of cattle increased at a faster rate than the grass acreage, suggesting that here the increase in stock was the cause and not the consequence of more abundant grass; but more commonly the increase in numbers of cattle seems to have been a by-product of the expanding grass acreage.

The extension of dairy farming was the most significant of the livestock changes; progressive farmers like Lawes established dairies because, as he put it, "foreign nations cannot so easily sell us milk."<sup>2</sup> Dairying had tended to increase in the traditional livestock areas on the clays north of the Chilterns ever since 1865, when the cattle plague decimated the population of the London cowhouses. Transport was the chief limitation on the production of milk for sale, and within two or three miles of a railway station farmers began to substitute milk-production for butter-making. With the decline in arable farming, other favourably placed farms along the railway lines adopted dairying as their grass acreage expanded, though they had frequently to await the construction of suitable buildings; a prospective tenant at Digswell insisted on a cowhouse for forty cows as a condition for taking over the farm. In addition to the London market, local markets for milk were provided by the condensed milk factory at Aylesbury and by the biscuit factory at Reading; the considerable increase in dairying in the Oxfordshire Chilterns is undoubtedly due in part to this local demand. The growing towns in the area, such as Watford, also provided local markets. The absence of water precluded dairying in the higher parts of the Chilterns, and the chief areas in which dairying increased lay in the lower south and in the major

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Wargrave Manor Estate, Maps 137 c. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Royal Commission on Agriculture, Minutes of Evidence, 1881, loc. cit., p. 949.*

valleys. Figure VIa shows the general correspondence between areas of greatest increase and the major valleys, most of which carried railway lines from London. In the clay vales to the north there were both an increase in the number of dairy cattle and a further switch from butter-making to milk-

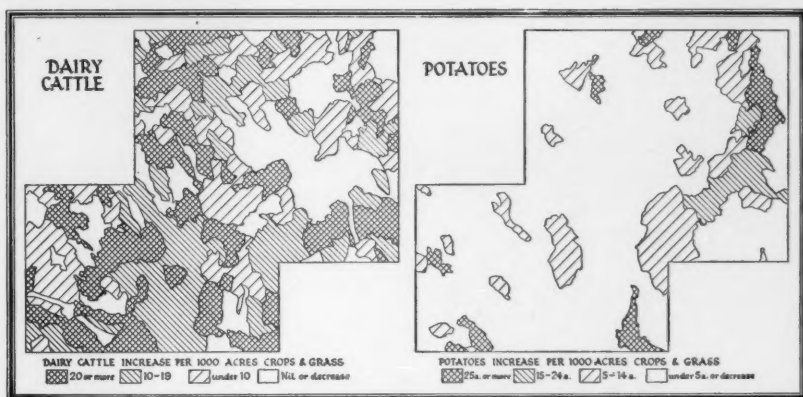


FIG. VI

selling, especially for the London market.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately there are no records by which this change in the use of milk can be measured; but one contemporary writer reported that in 1888 some 60,000 gallons of milk were sold each week out of the Vale of Aylesbury, more than half of it to London, and that "Aylesbury butter has lost its prestige."<sup>2</sup>

The increased interest in cattle-keeping was partly due to the immigration of livestock farmers from the west country and from Scotland, who were attracted by the low rents and the ease with which farms could be got. On the Knebworth estate, for example, in 1895 Scottish farmers outnumbered English by nine to six,<sup>3</sup> and so numerous were the newcomers when Rider Haggard made his survey of Hertfordshire in 1901 that he was led to ask "But where are the home people?"<sup>4</sup> The Scots were particularly associated with dairying while the Devon and Cornish farmers were said to be more concerned with stock-rearing.

On the reduced acreage of arable there were also adjustments in cropping (Figure IV). Restrictive covenants could no longer be enforced, both because of the difficulty of finding tenants and because farmers' working capital had

<sup>1</sup> Evidence of Mr Perkins, *Journal of the British Dairy Farmers Association*, VI, 1890, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> R. Gibbs, *A History of Aylesbury*, Aylesbury, 1888, pp. 666-7.

<sup>3</sup> Spencer, *loc. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> R. Haggard, *op. cit.*, I, p. 510.

been reduced; on the Bedford estate, where the strict enforcement of cropping restrictions has previously been noted, there was relaxation,<sup>1</sup> and on the claylands convenience had become "the controller of rotations."<sup>2</sup> Apart from the increase in temporary grass, the most general changes were the greater emphasis on oats at the expense of wheat and barley, and the marked reduction in the acreage of other fodder crops, especially turnips on light land and beans on heavy land. Oats replaced wheat as the leading cereal over most of the western Chilterns, and replaced barley as the second cereal in the Hertfordshire Chilterns, where the oat acreage increased despite the falling arable. Fewer sheep were one cause of the reduced turnip acreage, but high labour requirements were also a factor, and the place of turnips in the root break was partly filled by an increase in the acreage of bare fallow. On the clays beans occupied a smaller proportion of the diminished arable and the acreage under mangolds rose; but while there was a marked increase in bare fallow in the early years of the depression, this expansion was not maintained (Figure V, Stewkley, other crops). The least change in cropping occurred on the loams of the Icknield belt.

As with the laying down of land to grass, these generalizations conceal differences between farms. These can be illustrated by the Panshanger estate, where cropping records for a number of farms in close proximity permit comparison of the average acreage under different crops for the periods 1874-6 and 1889-91. On Lower Handside Farm, for example, the acreage under wheat fell 8 per cent, while the acreages under barley and oats rose 5 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. On Digswell Lodge Farm the wheat acreage declined less than 1 per cent, the barley acreage 11 per cent, while the oat acreage increased 10 per cent. At Attimore Hall the oat acreage rose 2 per cent, and acres under wheat and barley declined slightly, while on Birchall Farm the wheat acreage rose 5 per cent, the barley 1 per cent, and the oat acreage fell 4 per cent. Nevertheless, although there was much variation from farm to farm, the trend on most farms was similar.

While in many parts of the country farmers met falling cereal prices by growing potatoes and vegetables, few farmers in the Chilterns adopted these crops. Market gardening spread westward along the Thames terraces in south Buckinghamshire, and southward from the mid-Bedfordshire market-gardening area towards the foot of the Chilterns. But on the Chilterns and in the clay vales soils were either too poor or too heavy to encourage vegetable growing, while much of the area was too inaccessible; even Barton-

<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission on Labour, *loc. cit.*, p. 17, and J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-1*, London, 1852, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> Pringle, *loc. cit.*, p. 40.



in-the-Clay, little more than three miles from the nearest station, was held to be too far away for it to be suitable for market gardening.<sup>1</sup> The stony soils of the Chilterns were also unsuited to potato growing, which increased mainly in the Vale of St Albans and the Hitchin Gap (Figure VIb). Three causes promoted this expansion: the lighter soils, the immigration of Scottish farmers, who brought not only dairying but potato growing and ley farming, and the abundant supplies of manure which London provided. It was this last consideration which restricted potato growing to a narrow belt near the railway lines; manure cost only 4s. 6d. a ton at the station, but its price was more than doubled five miles away by transport charges.<sup>2</sup> Figure VIb shows how highly localized this expansion was, though the parish returns, which include more distant farms which did not grow potatoes, minimize the size of the increase. On the 340 acres of Digswell Lodge Farm an average of 43 acres of potatoes was grown in 1882-9 by a new Scottish tenant, whereas none had been grown in 1873-9 by the former tenant, a local farmer whose family had occupied the farm for six generations.<sup>3</sup>

There were other minor changes. Although fruit-growing never became a major activity in the Chilterns, additional orchards were planted, often by smallholders, along the foot of the escarpment, particularly between Totternhoe and Ivinghoe, and in places such as Holmer Green on the plateau. Poorer soils were sometimes taken out of cultivation altogether and planted with trees, usually conifers; many small parcels of arable were planted in the western Chilterns and are usually distinguished from the surrounding beechwoods by their conifers, their straight boundaries, and their names, e.g. Jubilee Plantation (Hambleton).

It is clear that the regional pattern of agricultural change was determined mainly by the nature of the soil and by accessibility. Where land was easy to cultivate and moderately fertile it remained in arable, often with little modification in its cropping; where soils were heavy arable fields were laid down to grass and pastoral farming was widely adopted; and where soils provided poor arable but were also unsuited to grass, pastoral farming was adopted almost involuntarily by leaving temporary grass unploughed. On the flatter terrain and somewhat better soils of the Hertfordshire Chilterns changes were less marked than further west, and the differences were accentuated by the relative ease with which manure could be got. While the importance of the supply of manure is probably exaggerated by the farmer who said that

<sup>1</sup> Bedfordshire County Council, Smallholdings File, Bedfordshire County Record Office.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of Evidence, Select Committee of the House of Commons on Railway Bills, Ques. 9223, 1881, BTC 899, in British Transport Commission Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Panshanger Papers.

without the abundant supplies of dung he would not have the land as a gift,<sup>1</sup> Spencer in his report on Hertfordshire did not see how the poorer land could have remained in cultivation without the advantages conferred by the railways.<sup>2</sup> The closer network of lines in Hertfordshire (Figure I) reinforced the advantages of greater nearness to London and better soils which the county enjoyed over Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Railways facilitated the adoption of dairying and potato growing, and their importance was generally recognized in higher rents near railway lines, away from which, said one farmer, was "agricultural death."<sup>3</sup>

The effects of other factors are more difficult to estimate and their incidence was probably more localized. Wages fell little, but there was continued emigration to the towns and many complaints of the quality of the remaining labour. How far the adjustments in farming were caused by labour shortage or by high labour bills is uncertain; but it seems probable that the need for economy was more important than the shortage of labour.<sup>4</sup> The presence of immigrant farmers, introducing new ideas, also affected the local pattern of change; they were among those most successful in riding the depression, partly because their farming suited the new conditions, partly because they were less conservative than the local farmers, and partly because they worked hard and lived hard. Adjustments also depended on landlords; wealthy landowners might retain tenants by temporary remissions of rent and facilitate change by providing necessary buildings, while tenants of poorer landowners would have been left to fend for themselves. But this consideration, while it undoubtedly modified local details, can hardly have determined the broad regional pattern of change.

The main effect of the events of this twenty-five year period was to emphasize differences which had only been latent before, and to diversify further the pattern of farming. The agriculture of 1875 could still be recognized in the hay-making on the London Clay, the corn and sheep farming on the Chilterns, and the pastoral farming in the clay vales; but these differences were becoming muted, and other differences were arising in their place. The contrast between the arable Chilterns and the grasslands to the north and south became less marked, but that between the eastern and western Chilterns and between valley and hilltop farm increased. A further thirty years were required to complete the process; but the foundations of change were clearly laid in this period.

<sup>1</sup> Rider Haggard, *op. cit.*, I, p. 542.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer, *loc. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Rider Haggard, *op. cit.*, I, p. 511.

<sup>4</sup> H. Rew, *Report on the Decline of the Agricultural Population of Great Britain*, Parliamentary Papers, xcvi, 1906, p. 37.

# Lancashire Livestock Farming during the Great Depression

By T. W. FLETCHER

THE phrase 'Great Depression' fairly describes the usual view taken of the condition of agriculture during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The ruin of her farmers was the price paid by Britain for the benefits she obtained, and conferred, as the great free trading nation of the world. Such is the usual verdict.<sup>1</sup> Of course depression did not press equally heavily on all farmers. According to Clapham, "north of the Humber . . . there was not so much wreckage as further south;" Lancashire was in the "half-light" and Cheshire, long famous for its dairies, "suffered less than any county."<sup>2</sup> But this was somehow marginal; depression was universal; it was merely that some luckier areas suffered less than the majority.

This paper explores the impact of the Great Depression upon the livestock farmers of Lancashire, the home of the cotton industry, of Cobden, Bright, and Free Trade, and, perhaps less widely appreciated, one of England's leading agricultural counties. It ranked sixth among English counties in area of agricultural land (c. 1890), and at least as high in terms of gross output per 100 acres. Like its neighbours, Cheshire, Derbyshire, the West Riding, Westmorland, and Cumberland, Lancashire was predominantly a livestock district, but unlike them, it contained within its borders an area of extremely intensive arable farming concentrated on the sands and mosses of the south-west. So different was, and is, this arable culture from the livestock farming of the north-west that it has been excluded from this study. As an example of pure arable farming that weathered the depression unchanged it merits separate treatment.<sup>3</sup>

## LANCASHIRE FARMING

South of the Ribble and east of the arable plain, Triassic sandstones give

<sup>1</sup> The standard work is R. E. Prothero (Lord Ernle), *English Farming Past and Present*, 4th ed., 1927, ch. XVIII, 'Adversity'; typical of the general historian is R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, 1936, p. 115: "British agriculture . . . was thrown overboard in the storm like an unwanted cargo" (eighteen-seventies); and p. 284: "Agriculture was ruined a second time over" (eighteen-nineties).

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain*, 1951 ed., III, pp. 80, 81.

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary descriptions may be found in *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, XXXVIII, 1877, pp. 462-526; XLVI, 1885, pp. 547-90; XLVII, 1886, pp. 120-71.

way to the coal measures and gritstones of the east Lancashire Pennines where the towns and villages of the cotton trade are strung along the valley bottoms, and in their interstices and on the hillsides are squeezed the small grass farms of the east Lancashire cowkeepers, men specializing in the retail sale of milk to the customers at their farm gates.

Agricultural writers of the nineteenth century say little of east Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> The best brief description is Rothwell's of 1850. "The district . . . is principally occupied as small dairy farms, there being a great demand for milk and butter; and not much adapted, from the nature of its soil and climate, for arable cultivation."<sup>2</sup> The system had not changed at the end of the century; the agent of an estate in the Blackburn-Oswaldtwistle area described his tenancies in 1895 as "all milk and butter farms." "They [the farmers] barter the products themselves in the large, adjoining towns; they retail it as you will understand."<sup>3</sup>

Although arable farming was only to be found in the south-west, milk production south of the Ribble was not confined to east Lancashire. Every town was supplied by producer-retailers on its outskirts whose methods were similar to but less intensive and more flexible than those of the east Lancashire men in that some crops were grown, to be sold when relative prices were favourable but otherwise fed to their cows. Such mixed farming was common in the Leigh-Wigan-Bolton-Chorley belt of country between the hills and the arable plain proper.

Lancashire, north of the Ribble, was a "purely agricultural district."<sup>4</sup> The Fylde plain between the gritstone hills of Bowland on the Yorkshire border to the east and the coast to the west had been the county's granary in the eighteenth century but by 1870 was an important dairying district and, like Cheshire, specialized in cheese production.<sup>5</sup> Milking stock were reared and

<sup>1</sup> For example, J. Holt, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Lancashire*, 1795, p. 210: "Capital, labour, ingenuity and attention are in this county diverted from agriculture;" G. Beesley, *A Report on the State of Agriculture in Lancashire . . .*, Preston, 1849, p. 7: "Occupiers of land in this district can scarcely be considered farmers;" W. J. Garnett, *Prize Report of the Farming of Lancashire*, Preston, 1849, p. 8: "Altogether a coal district" with "not much to interest a farmer."

<sup>2</sup> W. Rothwell, *Report of the Agriculture of the County of Lancaster*, 1850, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Royal Commission on Agricultural Distress*, 1894-97, Q. 40,649-50 (J. Howson); the *Alphabetical Digest* (C. 8146 of 1896) enables individual witnesses to be traced to their appropriate volume.

<sup>4</sup> Garnett, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> W. Smith, 'Agrarian Evolution since the Eighteenth Century', *Brit. Assoc. Report*, Blackpool, 1936, Appendix, p. 44; *Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interest, 1880-82*, C. 3375-IV (Coleman's Report), p. 40; J. P. Sheldon, *The Future of British Agriculture*, 1893, p. 114.

dry cows fattened for the butcher. It was also famous as a horse-breeding centre, well situated for supplying the industrial towns to the south.<sup>1</sup>

North of Lancaster stretches a narrow coastal strip, partly of limestone, where oats, roots, and seeds were grown for consumption on the farm by sheep and cattle on a system similar to the Scottish. Cattle were mainly of the dairy type, though at Holker, north of the sands, the duke of Devonshire maintained a celebrated herd of beef shorthorns. But, as Beesley had noted long before, "pedigree, shorthorned stock . . . are confined to gentlemen, or amateur farmers;"<sup>2</sup> 'Booth's shorthorns were too beefy; in Lancashire milk was demanded. The extraordinary growth of Barrow-in-Furness during the last third of the nineteenth century would yet further concentrate interest on the dairy rather than the beef animal. In the hills of Bowland and Furness, sheep and cattle rearing was universal. Butter was made on most farms, and with the increasing demand for milk cows, the by-products were used to rear dairy stock rather than children. Lamb, mutton, butter, and dairy heifers constituted the main output of these farms.<sup>3</sup>

Farms generally were small in Lancashire. The average size of 'holding' over 5 acres of crops and grass in 1875 was 40 acres compared with an average for England of 80 acres. In east Lancashire the comparable figure was 30. Only 8 per cent of all holdings over 5 acres were larger than 100 acres although accounting for more than 30 per cent of the total agricultural acreage of the county. Associated with the small size of farm was the importance of family labour. According to the 1871 Census the proportion of farmers and farmers' relatives to farm workers was 43 : 57, which was not very different from that of twenty years earlier (41 : 59) when Danson and Welton discovered to their surprise that south Lancashire was more densely populated with agriculturalists than any of the 'agricultural' counties.<sup>4</sup> Because of the relatively large contribution to the total labour force made by farmers themselves, the money cost of labour was a less important farm expense in Lancashire than on the larger farms of the arable east, even though pastoral

<sup>1</sup> *Preston Guardian* (hereafter *P.G.*), 1. 4. 1885: article on the development of shire breeding in Lancashire; *R.C. 1880-82*, Q. 67,733-4 (J. Clay).

<sup>2</sup> Beesley, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Information from the Kelsall family's diaries and notebooks relating to the hills of the Lancaster area which have been kindly lent to the writer by Mr W. Kelsall of Quernmore.

<sup>4</sup> T. A. Danson and J. T. Welton, 'On the Population of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1801-1851', *Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, XII, 1859, p. 63: "No facts are here before us which would justify an attempt to indicate the circumstances under which this ratio of agricultural population has been obtained, in the very heart of our district, usually regarded as pre-eminently, if not exclusively, favourable to manufacture and commerce. But the fact must be noticed as one of the most remarkable of those yet divulged by this enquiry."

settlement and industrial development had brought high farm wages. Wilson Fox's wage indices show that in 1867-71 average wages in the northern counties were 14s. 9d. a week compared with 11s. 11½d. in England and Wales and 11s. 4½d. in the eastern counties.<sup>1</sup> Lancashire wages, particularly south of the Ribble, were frequently higher than Wilson Fox's average for the northern counties.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern of Lancashire's farm output is shown by the Agricultural Returns first collected in 1866.

TABLE I  
CROPS AND STOCK PER 100 ACRES OF CROPS AND GRASS

Average of 1870, 1874, 1875 <sup>3</sup>	CROP ACREAGES				LIVESTOCK NUMBERS			
	Arable	Corn	Oats	Potatoes	Cattle	Milk Cows	Sheep	Pigs
England	57	32	6	1	17	7	81	8
Lancashire	31	14	7	4	30	16	43	5
East Lancashire	5	2	1	—	37	22	46	4
North Lancashire	27	13	7	2	32	15	61	5

Compared with England on the eve of the depression, Lancashire possessed more permanent grass, and a greater proportion of its corn acreage was devoted to oats for feed. The county was relatively densely stocked with cattle and particularly so with milking stock, but there were relatively fewer sheep and pigs. County totals, like England's, conceal fundamental regional differences. Lancashire's 31 per cent of arable was an average of extremes, of 5 per cent in east Lancashire and of 60 per cent in the arable south-west; north of the Ribble about a quarter of the agricultural acreage was under the plough.

The leading products of Lancashire's livestock farms were milk, sold retail and wholesale, butter, cheese, and mutton and lamb. Poultry were kept in increasing numbers, but information is scanty for the nineteenth century. Most of the beef production in the county was cow beef, a by-product of dairying; more important was the rearing of milking stock, mainly by

<sup>1</sup> 'Agricultural Wages in England and Wales During the Last 50 Years', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, LXIV, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Wages of labourers on the Park farm of the Hesketh estate ranged up to 16s. (County Record Office, DD He/62/31, 32, 33, 1867-71); cowmen near Manchester were paid 18s. (*Manchester Guardian*, 9. 2. 1872).

<sup>3</sup> The years 1870, 1874, and 1875 (the intervening years are unavailable) were chosen to avoid using the earlier, more unreliable, years; data were abstracted from the original parish and 'collection' summaries in the possession of the Ministry of Agriculture.



hill farmers north of the Ribble whose fortunes during the Great Depression were thus linked with those of the milk sellers of the Fylde and south Lancashire.

Among farmers' expenses other than labour, feed and rent predominated. Milk producers in the county had long been familiar with purchased feeding-stuffs, and the plentiful supply of brewers' wastes and the accessibility of imports at Liverpool encouraged a growing dependence on purchased feed by grassland farmers wishing to produce winter milk. The price movements of this crucial purchase during the Great Depression are of primary concern. Rent, as befits its many-sided character, is treated separately.

#### DEMAND

The population of Lancashire increased by some 50 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8; other things equal, demand for food would increase pro rata. But other things were not equal. Whatever form the Great Depression took, it was not a period of depression for the working classes, by comparison with whom the inhabitants of Lombard Street were insignificant as consumers of food. Earnings in the Lancashire cotton trade rose by some 25 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8<sup>1</sup> at a time when retail prices fell by about 26 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Per capita real income thus increased by some two-thirds, an annual rate of growth appreciably greater than during the 'good years' of 1850-70. Associated with rising income was the growing preference for protein rather than starch, for livestock products rather than cereals and potatoes. The oatmeal, coarse bread, cheese, and fat bacon of the farm labourer no longer sufficed for the more delicate appetites of the less robust cotton workers. Tea with milk, white bread and butter, meat, and eggs were their favourite dishes.<sup>3</sup>

Most vital to the Lancashire farmer because of its immunity from foreign competition was the demand for milk. On the conservative assumption that per capita intake of liquid milk in the county increased by a quarter between

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Wood, *The History of Wages in the Cotton Trade during the Past Hundred Years*, 1910, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> W. T. Layton, *An Introduction to the Study of Prices*, 1912, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> See *P.G.* 28. 4. 1894: of the "operative classes in our large towns"—"their fondness for eggs, tea and other 'luxuries' having taken the place of their liking for the plain and wholesome tuber." Lancashire budgets collected by G. von Schulze-Gaevernitz in 1891 illustrate the prominent place of dairy products and meat in the diet of cotton operatives. The average of five detailed family weekly budgets shows 6s. 4d. spent on bread, flour, cereals, and potatoes, 9s. 5d. on milk, butter, eggs, and cheese, and 6s. 8d. on beef, mutton, pork, bacon, and ham.—*The Cotton Trade in England and on the Continent*, 1895, trans. O. S. Hall, pp. 178 ff.; see also W. E. Bear, 'The Food Supply of Manchester', *J.R.A.S.*, LVIII, 1897, p. 511.

1867-71 and 1894-8 (see Appendix A), total demand would rise by 88 per cent. Depending on quality and price relative to the imported product, the demand for lamb, eggs, and butter may well have risen to a similar, if not greater, extent. Lancashire farmers were keenly aware, as they had been for generations, that their prosperity was linked with that of trade and industry as reflected in consumer demand rather than with the protectionist policies of the 'agricultural interest' who seemed mainly concerned with the effects of weather and imports on the home wheat crop.<sup>1</sup>

#### SUPPLIES AND PRICES

By contrast with demand, more specific information about farm supply is available as a result of the decision to collect agricultural statistics in 1866. In view of acreage uncertainties due to the declining use of local measures such as the Lancashire and Cheshire customary acres during the Great Depression, Graph A shows simply the numbers of the various classes of livestock in Lancashire between 1867 and 1900. Table II gives figures for the 'nineties comparable to those shown in Table I for the eighteen-seventies. Assuming that the increase in area of agricultural land from 748 to 823 thousand acres resulted from the displacement of customary measure by the statute acre,<sup>2</sup> it is clear that little change occurred in Lancashire farming during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century other than an intensifying of existing systems.

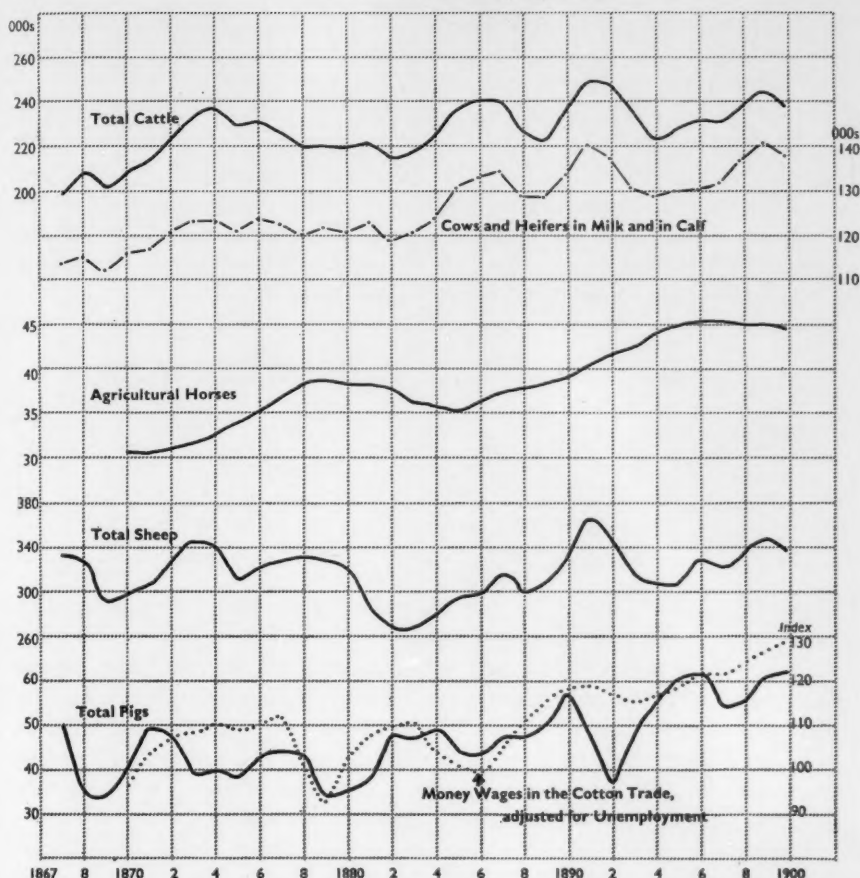
TABLE II  
CROPS AND STOCK PER 100 ACRES OF CROPS AND GRASS

Average of 1894-8 inc.	CROP ACREAGES				LIVESTOCK NUMBERS			
	Arable	Corn	Oats	Potatoes	Cattle	Milk Cows	Sheep	Pigs
England	47	23	8	1	18	8	64	9
Lancashire	31	13	10	5	31	18	44	8
East Lancashire	2	1	1	—	39	27	38	8
North Lancashire	23	10	7	3	37	19	70	8

<sup>1</sup> For example, a Brindle producer-retailer complained that "since business became bad at Gregson Lane Mill things have not been half so good for the farmers in the district" (*P.G.* 20. 4. 1895); cf. the Burnley milk-producer of fifty years earlier who was converted to a "corn-law repealer" by the discovery that the "closing of a mill in his neighbourhood suddenly deprived him of all his best customers."—W. Cooke Taylor, *Tour of the Manufacturing Districts*, 1842, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> The most common customary measures used in Lancashire were of 2.1 and 1.6 statute acres; see E. H. Smith, 'Lancashire Long Measure', *Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, cx, 1958, pp. 1-14.

## A. LIVESTOCK 1867-1900



(i) *Dairy Produce.* The total number of cattle rose from 226 thousand in 1870, 1874, and 1875, to 230 thousand in 1894-8, an increase of some 2 per cent; the number of cows and heifers in milk and in calf increased by 10 per cent.<sup>1</sup> This concentration on the productive milk cow was most noticeable in east Lancashire, where, with total cattle numbers rising no faster than in the county as a whole, cows and heifers increased by some 20 per cent. Nevertheless, the number of milk cows per 1,000 of the population of Lancashire,

<sup>1</sup> The growth of cattle numbers in north and east Lancashire was partly offset by a decline in the arable south-west of the county.

which in 1871-5 was 42, fell to 32 in 1894-8. Lancashire's milk supply could thus only be maintained by increasing yield per cow, by increasing the output of liquid milk at the expense of butter- and cheese-making, or by importing milk into the county.

If the yield per cow in Lancashire is assumed to have been 350 gallons per annum in 1870 and to have increased by 20 per cent to 420 in 1894-8, if per capita consumption is taken as  $\frac{1}{4}$  pint a day rising by 25 per cent, and if 30 per cent of total milk production was sold in the form of butter and cheese in 1870 with absolute output remaining constant thereafter, an overall picture emerges which is shown in Table III.<sup>1</sup> Considerable latitude may be allowed in the assumptions without affecting the general position.

TABLE III

Lancashire— million gallons	(i) Milk Production	(ii) Butter and Cheese	(iii) Milk Sales (i-ii)	(iv) Liquid Consumption	(v) Import (iv-iii)
Average of 1870-1	32.7	9.7	23.0	32.8	9.8
Average of 1894-8 inc.	47.1	9.7	37.4	61.2	23.8

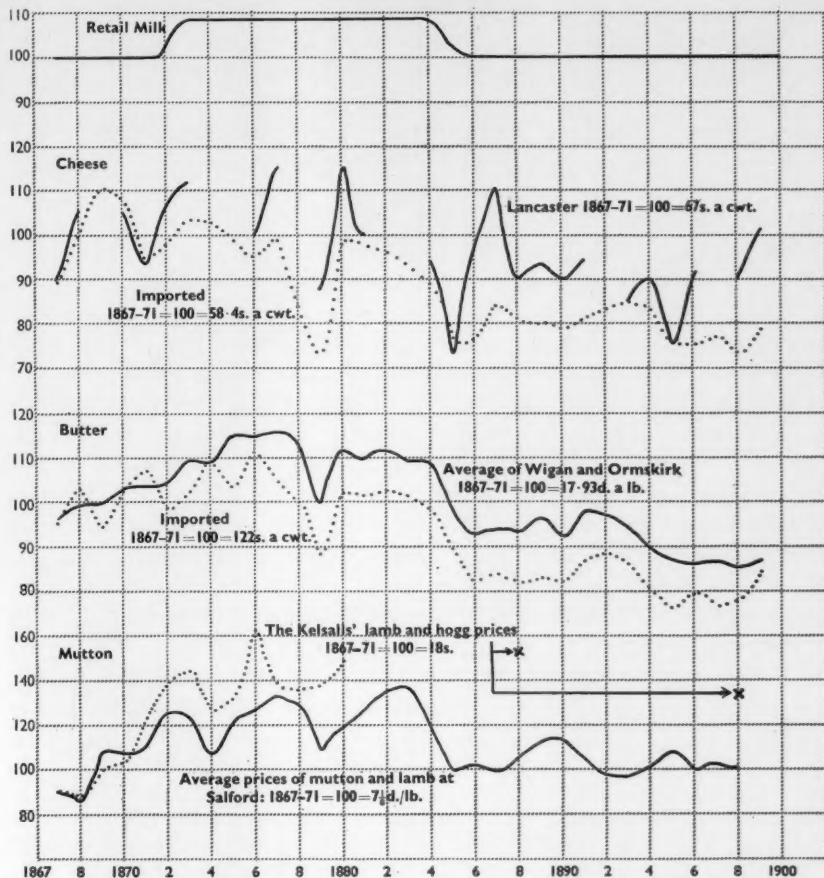
The import of milk into Lancashire was not easy: little was produced in the hills to the north and north-east, while over the Pennines to the east the industrial West Riding was barely self-sufficient. To the south the famous dairying county of Cheshire supplied the bulk of Lancashire's needs. The demands of other concentrations of consumers, however, notably the Great Wen itself, facilitated by the railway companies' use of differential rates to encourage the long haul, were, by the eighteen-seventies, stretching into Staffordshire, Derbyshire, and many parts of Cheshire.<sup>2</sup>

Local producers had thus every incentive to increase their output of liquid milk, and most butter- and cheese-makers in Lancashire, like those of Cheshire, were within competitive range of the large liquid markets of Manchester and Liverpool at a time when their dairy produce was subjected to growing import competition. But, as may be seen from Graph B, Lancashire farm cheese and butter did not fall in price to the same extent as imports; the inflexibility of supply, given the attraction of the liquid market, and the

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of these estimates see Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> See E. A. Pratt, *The Transition in Agriculture*, 1906, pp. 18-23; R.C. 1880-82, Q. 5,777-800, Q. 30,491; R.C. 1894-97, Q. 35,345-6; Report from the Select Committee on Railways, H.C. 374 of 1881, Q. 8,029; *Agricultural Gazette*, 11. 10. 1880.

## B. PRICE INDICES



growing consumer preference for better quality, account for the relative rise in price of the superior Lancashire grades. Evidence of change in the quantity of butter and cheese made on Lancashire farms is contradictory. Farmers are reported to have abandoned cheese-making for the more lucrative sale of liquid milk; they are also said to have improved and increased their output of Lancashire cheese, which did not reach Manchester market until the early eighteen-nineties. It was then mostly supplied from Preston, where in response to demand from urban south Lancashire the cheese market was at this

time growing rapidly and supplanting that of Lancaster.<sup>1</sup> Local farm butter was unknown in the Manchester market; it was mainly sold retail in the producing areas, either by producer-retailers to their milk customers—the usual method of disposing of surplus milk—in the local market, or by private contract to customers who preferred fresh farm produce and were prepared to pay a higher price for it.<sup>2</sup> Those hill farmers of north Lancashire who were unable or unwilling to sell liquid milk continued to produce butter for local sale.<sup>3</sup>

Price movements in Lancashire seem to have been as follows. The price of butter rose, as did liquid milk, during the eighteen-sixties and seventies and did not significantly break until 1878. The fall of 1879 was acute but of short duration: by 1880 butter and cheese prices seemed normal enough. But with the trade depression of 1883–6 prices fell, touching bottom in 1886 and bringing down both wholesale and retail milk prices. Recovery was hesitant and partial, and the break of 1890–3 in the upward surge of real wages checked demand and some prices gave way again after 1892.<sup>4</sup> Demand picked up in 1894, and the Lancashire milk-cow population, which had fallen steeply from a suspiciously prominent peak in 1891, resumed its increase.<sup>5</sup> The price of imported butter and cheese, like that of meat and eggs, fell sharply after 1893 to a minimum in 1897–8 and impressively larger quantities were imported. While milk prices held, local butter and all but top-quality cheese prices continued to sag until import prices recovered in 1898.

The most significant feature was the stability of the retail milk price and the limited movement of the wholesale price. As milk production was the most important single activity of Lancashire farmers, and as approximately

<sup>1</sup> *R.C. 1894–97*, Q. 11,320 (A. Wilson Fox); cf. *M.G.* 29. 3. 1883: "It is a notorious fact that the demand for milk in our largest cities is increasing at a rapid rate, so much so that many who have made cheese and more who have been making butter have given up both for milk selling." *P.G.* 12. 10. 1895; Bear, *loc. cit.*, p. 513; *P.G.* 1. 12. 1894: cheese fairs were instituted at Preston in 1879; in 1881 the total pitch was 769 cheeses, in 1893 17,618, and in 1894 18,622 cheeses.

<sup>2</sup> *R.C. 1894–97*, Q. 40,650 (J. Howson), Q. 12,593 (T. Worthington); *P.G.* 18. 4. 1891, 24. 1. 1891; Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Kelsall Diaries; but even in Furness whole milk selling was common, with that surplus to market requirement being made into butter, the skim milk "finding a ready sale" (*P.G.* 22. 9. 1881).

<sup>4</sup> This is true of market butter but not of better quality cheese which held its price until 1895, when it suffered from a 'record' supply due to the hot summer (*M.G.* 3. 10. 1895, *P.G.* 18. 4. 1896), a diminishing demand as a result of the cold spring (*R.C. 1894–97*, Q. 62,411), and the cheapness of frozen mutton (*ibid.*).

<sup>5</sup> "Suspicious" because there is nothing in the state of trade or the movement of prices in 1888–91 to account for the steep fall in cow numbers after 1891. A possible explanation put forward at the time is that high meat prices led to abnormal slaughterings: certainly dairy stock were highly priced and in short supply in 1893–4 (*P.G.* 7. 10. 1893, 10. 11. 1894).



three-quarters of the total dairy output took the form of liquid milk, the maintenance of the milk price during a period of generally falling prices was clearly a powerful factor in supporting farmers' incomes and encouraging expansion of output.

It seems that a fair degree of equilibrium existed between farmers' net returns from the sale of milk and the making of cheese or butter, except for poor quality cheese and, after 1885 possibly and after 1893 almost certainly, for butter sold in the local market.<sup>1</sup> In these circumstances the less efficient producers would be persuaded to improve the quality of their product, particularly in the case of cheese where relatively high returns might be achieved,<sup>2</sup> improve its marketing, more feasible in the case of butter,<sup>3</sup> or enter the liquid market. A shift to liquid sales was also encouraged by a fall in rail transport costs which, between the eighteen-seventies and the eighteen-nineties, approximately halved within the area supplying Manchester.<sup>4</sup>

Normally butter was made on the farm all the year round, frequently from milk surplus to retail liquid requirements, whereas cheese-making was usually a seasonal occupation when the cows were out at grass. Thus price relationships varied seasonally, as they did in different parts of the county, and local opportunities offered scope to the enterprising to market their milk in its most profitable form. Peter Blundell, the well-known Fylde farmer and horsebreeder, made cheese all the year round, whereas some of his neighbours confined their cheese-making to spring and autumn; in the height of the summer they sold liquid milk into the spreading seaside resorts.<sup>5</sup> Others combined cheese with winter butter or winter milk; all depended upon circumstance. Intermittent developments of this nature during the Great Depression, the fruit of innumerable decisions by thousands of small farmers, produced a remarkable increase in the supplies of liquid milk and improved the quality of farm butter and cheese.<sup>6</sup> The existence of local preferences for farm produce should warn the unwary against the use of import prices to measure farmers' receipts.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ruth Cohen, *A History of Milk Prices*, pp. 21 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> For example, even in the eighteen-nineties 70s. a cwt was obtained at Preston in the spring (*M.G.* 29. 3. 1893, 29. 3. 1894, 27. 3. 1895).

<sup>3</sup> For the advantages of marketing butter privately, see *P.G.* 24. 1. 1891, 18. 4. 1891, and *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 21,761, 35,331-48.

<sup>4</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 28. 3. 1872; *Report from the S.C. on Railways*, 1881, Q. 8021, 8029; *Report on Railway Rates and Charges Provisional Order Bills*, 1891, Q. 8499 and p. 946; Bear, *loc. cit.*, p. 508.

<sup>5</sup> *P.G.* 20. 4. 1895, 13. 10. 1894.

<sup>6</sup> Some help was given by both County Council and private landowners in the form of attempts to improve the quality of farm butter and cheese, mainly in the direction of standardization by the encouragement of scientific methods; see, e.g., *P.G.* 18. 4. 1891, 30. 4. 1892.

(ii) *Sheep*. The remaining livestock product of importance in Lancashire was mutton. The total sheep population of the county was 319 thousand in 1870, 1874-5; it fell steeply to a trough in 1882-3 from natural causes of weather or disease common throughout the country, and recovered by 1894-8 to some 4 per cent above its original level. Sheep numbers declined in east Lancashire owing to the growing industrial exploitation of these hills as quarries, reservoirs, and gathering-grounds, and to the competition of retail milk selling. Most of Lancashire's sheep were to be found north of the Ribble in the hills of Bowland and Furness, and here total numbers increased by over 20 per cent.

There was a fundamental difference in the type of sheep kept on arable and hill farms in the nineteenth century. The former were heavy, often long-woolled breeds, and their owners suffered from the extreme fall in wool prices and the import competition, particularly of frozen mutton after 1883, which lowered the price of their fat mutton. In contrast, wool was less important to the hill farmer; it was only of carpet quality, and even when it fetched a shilling a pound in the early 'seventies brought in but 3s. a ewe as against 25s. for her lamb. The lean horned hill ewe and her crosses bred the small lambs and lightweight mutton that were in growing demand and with which, during this period, the foreign supply was not directly competitive. It is significant that the ratio of lambs to total sheep in Lancashire increased by almost 10 per cent during the Great Depression, and the explanation of this shift from wether mutton to lamb production is to be found in the relative movement of their prices which reflected the impact of changes in consumer demand upon the supply situation. As with cheese, the better quality home produce was considered superior to the imported and priced accordingly. Newspaper reports of Salford market, the largest livestock market in the county, stress throughout the period the high demand for lamb and lightweight mutton.<sup>1</sup> Fat wether mutton, like the live and frozen imported, sold at well below the price of English and Scotch lamb.<sup>2</sup> The difference was particularly wide in 1895 when frozen imported mutton could be bought in London for 2d. a lb. at a time when first quality English lamb was fetching up to 11d. at Salford. The general position was that particularized by the market reporter in 1895: "Choice small sheep were scarce and in good de-

<sup>1</sup> For example, *M.G.* 8. 1871: "Choice lambs . . . were very scarce and much sought after;" *ibid.* 3. 10. 1894: "Good demand for choice lightweight sheep."

<sup>2</sup> For example, *M.G.* 8. 1871: "Foreign sheep were of such indifferent quality that they were almost unsaleable;" *ibid.* 4. 10. 1871: foreign sheep were a "drug on the market;" *ibid.* 3. 6. 1885: "inferior qualities sold slowly at a reduction;" *ibid.* 3. 6. 1896: "heavy and fat sheep not quotable."

mand at late full rates, but heavy and inferior sold slowly at lower [compared with the previous week] prices."<sup>1</sup> Mutton (including ewe) prices at Salford fell slightly from 7·2 to 7·1 pence a lb. between 1867-71 and 1894-8; lamb prices rose from 7·5 to 8·1d.

Lancashire sheep farmers would undoubtedly agree with the Yorkshireman who, quoting the price of "small mutton" as "well worth 8d. a lb." to the Royal Commission in November 1895, admitted "we have not been doing badly at all. Taking the depression during the last twenty years the sheep have held up wonderfully."<sup>2</sup> Following consumers' preference and increasing their rate of turnover in the process, sheep farmers abandoned the rearing of heavyweight, low-priced wethers in favour of an annual crop of lightweight, high-priced lambs.

(iii) *Poultry and Pigs*. The number of pigs in Lancashire increased by about a third during the Great Depression; the number of poultry also increased but no figures are available. Total imports of pigmeat into the U.K. more than doubled between 1871-5 and 1894-8, and prices of imported fresh pork and bacon fell by 8 per cent and 13 per cent respectively; no local quotations have been found. From 1867-71 import prices of eggs rose in the early 'seventies but gradually declined to about the original level by 1894-8; unlike import prices local prices at Stockport did not fall after 1886. The profit to be derived from poultry and their growing importance in Lancashire were frequently discussed.<sup>3</sup> In that feed accounts for some 80 per cent of production costs, as with pigs, the steep fall in purchased feed prices during the Great Depression constituted a clear profit incentive for the farmer to increase his output, particularly of eggs, which, as the price indicates, were in high demand and, as today, were preferred fresh from the farm.<sup>4</sup>

The Yorkshireman's verdict was applicable to all the main output products of the Lancashire farmer during the Great Depression when considered in relation to the general course of prices. Even the price of his poorest cheese did not sink to the depths reached by the wheat price. The decline in world cereal prices certainly affected Lancashire livestock farmers, but most agreeably, as the note on feed prices indicates.

(iv) *Labour*. Lancashire Census data provide only a crude picture of variations within the agricultural population which in total fell from 51 to 40 thousand between 1871 and 1901. The changes recorded in the numbers of both farmers and their relatives are suspect, but whereas the decline in the number of farmers is exaggerated a spurious increase is shown in the number

<sup>1</sup> *M.G.* 2. 10. 1895; cf. *P.G.* 2. 1. 1892.

<sup>2</sup> *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 61,014 (P. Norfolk).

<sup>3</sup> For example, *J.R.A.S.*, 1877, p. 492; *P.G.* 11. 4. 1885, 2. 4. 1892, 15. 9. 1892, 20. 4. 1895.

<sup>4</sup> See *R.C.* 1894-97, Q.62,166-230, and *Final Report*, p. 254.

of relatives.<sup>1</sup> The total of farmers and relatives is perhaps not too inaccurate and its proportion to that of male farm workers rose slightly from 43 : 57 in 1871 to 47 : 53 in 1901. The number of farm workers in the county fell by 28 per cent during these years, from 29·4 to 21·1 thousand. Alternative employment was close at hand south of the Ribble, if less so to the north, and the exodus of labour from farms was facilitated by the gradual introduction of mowing machines, 'hay collectors', and other machinery to cope with the haytime peak of the grassland farmer's year. As always, farmers' sons and daughters were "flocking to the towns," bringing home in 1894 "from £2 to £3 10s. a week."<sup>2</sup>

Farm wages in the northern counties, already higher than elsewhere in 1867-71, were raised yet further during the Great Depression. In 1894-8 they stood at 17s. 4½d. a week, an increase of 18 per cent compared with average wages in England and Wales which had risen by only 12 per cent to 13s. 4½d.<sup>3</sup> Wages throughout the country rose in the 'seventies but whereas in the north gains were consolidated in some areas a slipping back was evident. Almost all Wilson Fox's Lancashire evidence was collected from the Fylde where the weekly wages of a stockman were 17s.-18s. in both 1891 and 1901. South of the Ribble £1 a week was commonly quoted in the 'nineties.<sup>4</sup> To the farm worker the period was one of slowly growing comfort. Like the cotton operative he benefited from the fall in retail prices, but increases in his cash income of 18 per cent compared unfavourably with the 25 per cent increase of an initially higher income enjoyed by his fellows in the factory: here was the continuing incentive to leave the farm.

With a decline of 28 per cent in the number of paid workers and an increase of some 18 per cent in average wages, the total wage bill paid by Lancashire farmers declined by 15 per cent during the Great Depression. Many Lancashire farmers employed no regular labour other than their families, and of those who did, almost all worked alongside their men. Their whole way of life contrasted vividly with that of the large tenant farmers of the corn-growing areas.

(v) *Feed*. On dairy farms feed was much the most important cash outlay. A Fylde farmer in 1885 spent £651 10s. 1d., or approximately £13 a cow, on

<sup>1</sup> Exaggerated by the exclusion of retired farmers after 1871; decennial numbers of farmers from 1861 to 1901 were, in thousands, 16·8, 16·0, 14·8, 13·5, 12·2; female relatives were included in 1901 in contrast to the preceding three Censuses; for a critical analysis of these figures see Lord Eversley, 'The Decline in Number of Agricultural Labourers in Great Britain', *J.R.S.S.*, LXX, 1907, pp. 267-319.

<sup>2</sup> *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 14,274 (J. Barlow).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 12,580 (T. Worthington): "19s. to £1"; Q. 27,290 (T. Mercer): "£1"; *P.G.* 20. 4. 1895: "20s."

feed for his cows, which numbered between 48 and 52; his rent and rates for 98 acres were £338 8s. 6½d.<sup>1</sup> On more intensive dairy farms expenditure on feed was relatively greater. Thomas Barlow of Rossendale in east Lancashire spent £400 a year on provender in the 'nineties for 31 milking cows, which again averaged some £13 a cow but at prices lower than those of the preceding decade. His farm was 44 acres and probably rented at about £90.<sup>2</sup> Such intensive stocking was not uncommon among the producer-retailers of east Lancashire:<sup>3</sup> the hill farmers of the north were more self-sufficient.

The Royal Agricultural Society's judges remarked in 1877 on the "abundant supply of feeding stuffs in the great port of Liverpool,"<sup>4</sup> where imports of maize increased from an average of 4.3 million cwt for the years 1867-71 to 13.1 million in 1894-8, and of oilcakes from 18.2 to 97.5 thousand tons. The fall in price was the factor mainly responsible for this increase in the quantity of feed purchased by farmers, which was in turn, apart from slow advances in breeding and management, the means whereby milk and livestock output was so signally and, it would seem, profitably expanded. In the case of the two important items maize and oilcakes, overseas trade figures for the U.K. show a fall in price of 45 per cent and 37 per cent respectively between 1867-71 and 1894-8, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the cost of feed to the Lancashire farmer fell by at least a third during this period.

With labour an overhead on the ubiquitous family farm, many dairy farmers on the plain both north and south of the Ribble continued to grow oats and other crops for livestock feed. In such circumstances the market price of his oats was not the farmer's chief concern; more apposite was the relationship between the oat price and the cost of a comparable feed. As the Wiltshire man explained to the Royal Commission in 1895, he had grown and sold oats at 24s. 6d. a quarter and purchased Russian barley for "13s. 9d. delivered."<sup>5</sup> It is unlikely that such opportunities escaped the Lancashire man. Twenty years earlier south-west Lancashire arable farmers were purchasing maize at 6s. 6d. a cwt to feed their farm horses; their oats they sold for 8s. 9d.<sup>6</sup> If the Lancashire farmer in search of profit dared deprive his horses of their oats, he would certainly experiment with the diet of the more accommodating cow as opportunity prompted. These considerations partly

<sup>1</sup> *J.R.A.S.*, XLVII, 1886, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 14,280 (T. Barlow); the rent is estimated.

<sup>3</sup> Stocking on the Thwaites's estate was equivalent to "one head for every 1 ac. 1 r. 35 p. of land."—*R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 40,661 (J. Howson).

<sup>4</sup> *J.R.A.S.*, XXXVIII, 1877, p. 504.

<sup>5</sup> *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 15,821 (Sir G. Goldney).

<sup>6</sup> *J.R.A.S.*, XXXVIII, 1877, p. 486.



explain the maintenance of the county's oat acreage during a period of falling oat prices, although more to the point in arable south-west Lancashire, where the bulk of the county's oats were grown, was the relationship between the prices of wheat and oats.

#### RENT

Rent is of peculiar interest. Net rent represents the income of the landowner; it may be thought of as the return on his investment. Gross rent is both a cost to the farmer and a measure of the demand for land and thus indirectly of the changing prospects in agriculture. Rent is somewhat insensitive in this last respect as landlords and their agents do not necessarily accept the highest bidder and the rent of a farm tenanted by the same family for decades is slow to change. Landlord-tenant relationships were important in Lancashire where the owner-occupier was a negligible figure. Owners farmed less than 10 per cent of Lancashire's agricultural land; the comparable figure for England was 20.<sup>1</sup> In east Lancashire, the most industrialized part of the county, the percentage was as low as 7.<sup>2</sup> The land-owning families of Lancashire, with the Stanleys and the Molyneuxs at their head, were of ancient descent and clung tenaciously to their estates.<sup>3</sup> Manufacturers who invested in land either purchased small properties within the county or, like Sir Robert Peel the elder, looked elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

The lease and the covenant were rare, particularly south of the Ribble. The country-wide survey conducted by the *Mark Lane Express* in 1876 into the effects of the Agricultural Holdings Act of the previous year summarized the position in Lancashire;<sup>5</sup> few leases were to be found other than on Crown property north of Lancaster; nor were they desired by the tenantry who, perhaps like Peter Blundell, had "no desire for either a lease or tenant right, regarding Lord Derby as the best landlord in England."<sup>6</sup> If this sentiment be thought to represent a survival of 'feudal' instinct in rural north Lan-

<sup>1</sup> Estimates from *Agricultural Returns* 1890-8 inclusive.

<sup>2</sup> 'Collection' figures; complicated by the existence of Honour of Clitheroe copyholders whose unique tenure was, in practice, almost indistinguishable from freehold.

<sup>3</sup> Of 24 estates in south Lancashire of over 3,000 acres in the eighteen-seventies 19 were in the hands of families who could trace their occupation back at least as far as the reign of Henry VIII; the remaining five were also ancient estates of inheritance.—J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1879 ed.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Mr Earnshaw, a cotton manufacturer of Bury, bought a small estate in the Fylde of "one farm or more" (*P.G.* 20. 10. 1894); another Bury manufacturer, "Squire" Mucklow, purchased 7,000 acres in Cornwall in the mid-nineteenth century (*P.G.* 29. 9. 1894).

<sup>5</sup> W. E. Bear, *The Relations of Landlord and Tenant in England and Scotland*, 1876, Appendix, pp. 104-31, where the findings of the survey are usefully summarized.

<sup>6</sup> *R.C. 1880-82*, Coleman's Report, p. 38.



cashire, at the other extreme was Thomas Worthington of Wigan who declared before a Royal Commission, "I have taken my farm like taking a house. When I have paid the rent I am master of the show."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of what might appear to be a lamentable absence of security, Lancashire farmers were prepared to sink large amounts of tenant's capital into their farms.<sup>2</sup> They found that it paid to farm intensively even though under six months' notice to quit should the land be required for building.<sup>3</sup> The tenant's security was rooted in "confidence in his landlord."<sup>4</sup>

The concomitant of the annual tenancy in Lancashire was the freedom from restriction. As early as 1876 every Lancashire farm mentioned in the report of the Prize Farm Competition was noted as being an "annual tenancy" with "no restrictions."<sup>5</sup> This informality between landlord and tenant was partly due to the presence of manufacturers. The main economic incentive of many ancient families in retaining their south Lancashire estates in the nineteenth century was the prospect of mineral rights, coal royalties, ground rents, and the other 'casual profits' that industrial development and the growth of population brought to the landowner.

Dr H. A. Rhee's index of national farm rents rises from 100 in 1870-1 to a peak of 113 in 1877 and then slowly declines to 75 in 1899.<sup>6</sup> Lancashire rents were higher throughout than Dr Rhee's average for the country and ranged between 30s. and 68s. per acre.<sup>7</sup> Moreover no fall is apparent when 1870 is compared with the end of the century. Total 'agreed' rents on the Derby estates in Fylde and Bowland rose from £16,346 in 1884 to £20,212 in 1904 with arrears running at the rate of 14 and 15 per cent respectively. In view of the possibility of addition by piecemeal purchase, a contingency not without

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 1894-97, Q. 12,774 (T. Worthington).

<sup>2</sup> R.C. 1880-82, Q. 67,501 (J. Coleman): "Tenant's capital of £15-20 an acre... very much larger than ordinary capital;" *J.R.A.S.*, xxxix, 1886, p. 109: "the extraordinary development of land values at their own risk by yearly tenants."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Coleman's Report, p. 32; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 33-4: a Stretford tenant of Sir Humphrey de Trafford had "no special agreement as to tenant right and does not appear to want it. He said that if he knew that he was going to leave next year he could not afford to alter his management."

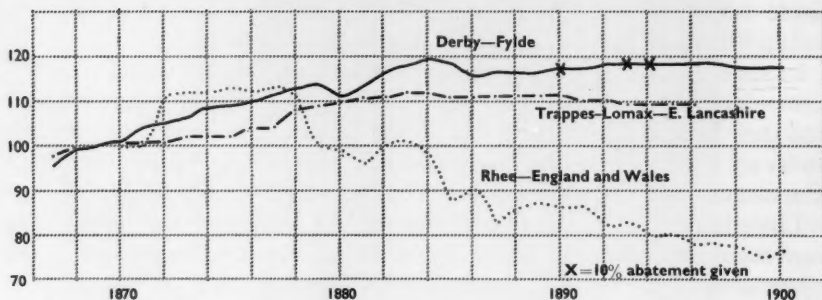
<sup>4</sup> R.C. 1880-82, Q. 67,505-7 (J. Coleman); cf. R.C. 1894-97, Q. 27,283 (T. Mercer): "Lord Sefton and Lord Derby own all for miles around, so we have confidence, I believe every tenant has, that they will not disturb a tenant."

<sup>5</sup> *J.R.A.S.*, xxxix, 1877, p. 467.

<sup>6</sup> *The Rent of Agricultural Land in England & Wales, 1870-1943* (Central Landowners' Association, 1949), Table II, pp. 44-6.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, R.C. 1880-82, Coleman's Report, pp. 31-41; *J.R.A.S.*, xlviii, 1886, pp. 146, 165; *P.G.* 29. 10. 1892; Schulze-Gaevernitz, *op. cit.*, p. 174; *Agricultural Gazette*, 17. 10. 1892; R.C. 1894-97, Q. 9,991 (W. Smith), Q. 12,526 (T. Worthington); *ibid.*, C. 7400 of 1894, Appendix A iv, 413, Appendix A xiii, 429.

## C. RENT



Derby, 1867-71=100=£4,634=index of agreed rents from the manor of Trayles, Roseacre, and Quarles.

Trappes-Lomax, 1867-71=100=£3,009=index of agreed and paid rents from 40 identical farms.

Rhee, 1870-1=100=26s. 7d.=index of average agricultural rent per acre in England and Wales.

significance in itself, the rents of the large manor of Trayles were scrutinized. The gross rent increased from £4,452 in 1867 to £5,478 in 1884, from which figure there was little significant change up to 1904. Arrears stood at the formidable figure of £4,996 in 1867, fluctuated downward to £2,870 in 1882, dropped sharply to £745 in 1883, and did not reach four figures again until 1900; in 1904 arrears were £862. Only a small fraction of these arrears were 'carried out', viz., written off as bad; the bulk were eventually paid. Ten per cent abatements were given in 1890, 1893, and 1894.<sup>1</sup>

On the Trappes-Lomax estates of Clayton and Allsprings in east Lancashire gross rents from 40 farms rose from £2,942 in 1867 to a maximum of £3,368 in 1883, declined slightly to £3,270 in 1893, and remained at this figure until the end of the rental in 1896. No abatements are mentioned and arrears were negligible throughout, perhaps because almost all these rents were paid in cash, as might be expected in an area of producer-retailers.<sup>2</sup> On the nearby Thwaites's estate, agreed rents remained at an average of £2 5s. 3d. an acre from 1875 to 1895, remissions of perhaps 15 per cent being granted in 1892 and 1893.<sup>3</sup> Immediately over the county boundary on the Lister estate near Halifax rents remained unchanged, after allowing for industrial loss of acreage, between 1870 and 1900.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence of this nature, corroborated by contemporary opinion such as

<sup>1</sup> C.R.O., DDK (Fylde Rents).

<sup>2</sup> C.R.O., Trappes-Lomax Rentals.

<sup>3</sup> R.C. 1894-97, Q. 40,841 (J. Howson); the percentage remitted is not given as such.

<sup>4</sup> Shibden Hall, Halifax, Lister MSS.

Smith's to the effect that "permanent reductions were very few, they were the exception,"<sup>1</sup> and by comment in the *Preston Guardian* suggesting that a 10 per cent abatement in an occasional year after 1890 was as much as the Lancashire tenant could expect,<sup>2</sup> is indicative of the firmness of farm rents in Lancashire during the Great Depression. It is extremely doubtful, after all allowance has been made for reduction and remission in the 'nineties, whether by the end of the century rents actually paid had fallen to the level of 1867-71. The Tithe Act of 1891, which enforced the payment of tithe by the landowner by transferring to him the legal responsibility for its payment, appeared to make no change in the tenants' position in Lancashire. Evidence from the Derby and Hesketh (south-west Lancashire) rentals corroborates Thomas Worthington's statement in 1894 that the invariable practice after 1891 was to add the Tithe or Tithe Rent Charge to the rent;<sup>3</sup> this has been discounted in the Derby rent series which is net of tithe throughout.

The net income position of the landowner is obscure. Little is known about estate maintenance costs and investment, but such evidence as has been found indicates that at least on some estates the level of investment was maintained,<sup>4</sup> even though, as was claimed, interest-free improvements were effected by the landlord in lieu of rent reductions.<sup>5</sup> Any appreciable fall in net income was improbable and an impoverished landowner was unlikely to be found in Lancashire, albeit his property were confined to agricultural land, which was rarely the case.<sup>6</sup>

As evidence of depression within the county rent reductions and abatements in the eighteen-nineties should be treated with caution. The activities of the newly formed Lancashire farmers' associations during a period when

<sup>1</sup> *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 9,979 (W. Smith); cf. President Rimmer's complaint at the Lancashire Tenant Farmers' meeting that there "had been few reductions in Lancashire rents."—*P.G.* 10. 12. 1892.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., *P.G.* 4. 2. 1893, 7. 10. 1893, 13. 1. 1894, 28. 4. 1894.

<sup>3</sup> *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 12,527-9 (T. Worthington).

<sup>4</sup> See, for the Thwaites's estate, *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 40,856 (J. Howson); Sir Charles Tempest, *P.G.* 7. 10. 1893; Trappes-Lomax, C.R.O.; Derby, *P.G.* 25. 9. 1886, 14. 10. 1893; Sefton, *P.G.* 14. 10. 1893; Duchy of Lancaster, *P.G.* 14. 10. 1893, *R.C. 1894-97*, C. 7400 of 1894, Appendix A XIII, p. 429; Crown, *ibid.*, Appendix A IV, p. 413. Land reclamation continued; 500 acres of the Rawstorne property at Hutton and Howick were reclaimed from the marsh in 1887 when the rent was £1 an acre; in 1894 it was £3 10s. and "cheap at the price" (*P.G.* 19. 5. 1894).

<sup>5</sup> This was alleged by J. Kay, an official of the Lancashire Federation and an ex-tenant of the Thwaites's estate, before the Royal Commission in March 1894 (Q. 14,009) and vehemently denied by the agent Howson in the following February (Q. 40,661).

<sup>6</sup> *P.G.* 7. 2. 1891: tenants were "forthcoming" and "nothing is heard of landlords being obliged to farm their estates themselves;" *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 11,313 (A. Wilson Fox): "Land agents say the land has not gone back . . . and that farms will let easily."

agricultural depression was widely assumed to be endemic were inevitably affected by national and political considerations.<sup>1</sup> Lancashire farmers were not protectionists<sup>2</sup> and local price changes offered only a small target; there remained the landowner, for long the recipient of criticism from urban radicals.

A continuous campaign was mounted by this vociferous minority of organized farmers against the level of rents. It was well publicized by local newspapers whose editors tended to look at agriculture through eyes conditioned by the national press, which in turn reflected the view of the corn-growing interest. Vivid contrasts and "lessons for Lancashire landlords" were drawn between the fall in rents in the eastern counties and their immobility in Lancashire. The challenge was reiterated that "if the price of land did not come down in Lancashire and Cheshire, it would have to do."<sup>3</sup> Such a campaign, though conducted by a minority, could not but have some effect on tenants and landlords and their agents as they engaged in their bi-annual commiseration over the dearth of coin in the pockets of each. The relative stability of Lancashire rents under such pressure suggests not only a continuing demand for agricultural land, which may conceivably have been misguided, but the absence of any fundamental depression.<sup>4</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The experiences of Lancashire livestock farmers during the Great Depression are graphically illustrated by the movement of their product prices which, unlike Sauerbeck's curve of general prices in terms of which the Great Depression is seen as a period of continuously falling prices from the plateau edge of a Golden Age in 1873-4 to the trough of the mid-nineties,

<sup>1</sup> The main body was the Lancashire Tenant Farmers' Association founded in January 1892; a short account of the origins and development of the various local associations since their effective beginning in 1890 is given in *P.G.* 10. 12. 1892.

<sup>2</sup> The agricultural correspondent of the *Preston Guardian*, after a tour of the Fylde, "was surprised to find that most of the gentlemen I called upon were staunch Free Traders" (*P.G.* 13. 4. 1895). Lancashire farmers considered that the Great London Agricultural Conference addressed by Chaplin in 1892 was a "profound disappointment in that it was throughout PROTECTIONIST."—*P.G.* 10. 12. 1892.

<sup>3</sup> *P.G.* 5. 10. 1895; repeated 3. 10. 1896; attributed to Chaplin, December 1892.

<sup>4</sup> See the exchange between Giffen and Wilson Fox (*R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 11,313-22), particularly Q. 11,322: "Why should they compete for farms . . . unless it is the case that it pays them to do it in Lancashire?—One would think that would be the case. One is loth to believe them unbusinesslike, and to bid higher than they can pay." Cf. *P.G.* 16. 10. 1897: "So far the number of farms to be let in north Lancashire may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and yet have some to spare, and the small acreage of land that has this year been sold in public sales has made very good prices."

climbed steadily upwards into the early 'eighties to fall back to approximately the 1867-71 level by the 'nineties. With the price of feed roughly following the price of wheat and falling throughout, livestock farmers enjoyed a double incentive to expand output, namely, a fall in production costs and a continually rising demand for their products, most of which enjoyed a degree of protection, derived from transport difficulties and quality differences, against the competition of imports.

At a crude estimate the value of gross output from Lancashire livestock farms increased by a third during the Great Depression. On the other side total labour costs fell by some 15 per cent and rent may be taken as unchanged. If it be assumed that in 1867-71 expenditure on feed equalled the combined cost of labour and rent, then with a fall of a third in the price of feed, the maintenance of total costs in 1894-8 at their earlier level would permit an increase of 60 per cent in the quantity of feed purchased. As total milk output, in all forms, increased by less than 50 per cent, it would seem that such an increase of expenditure on feed was ample for the expansion envisaged. A rise in the value of output with no increase in total costs indicates a larger gross profit margin, to be divided moreover between a smaller number of farmers if Census data are even approximately correct.

Thus considering the evidence of output, prices, the movement of rent, and the lack of concrete evidence of distress during a period when such evidence was specifically requested by successive Royal Commissions, it must be concluded that no great depression of agriculture existed in Lancashire during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, the evidence indicates substantial prosperity until 1884 and the mitigation of any subsequent adverse impact from declining output prices by a relatively steeper fall in feed costs and by an expansion of output.

In explanation of this immunity from distress a number of factors may be cited, all to some extent recognized both by contemporary and post-mortem investigators. They include the keeping of livestock, particularly milk cows, sheep, pigs, and poultry; a reliance on grassland and purchased feed rather than the plough; the existence of small farms largely independent of hired labour; the presence of adjacent urban markets; the practice of direct sale to the consumer; and freedom of the tenant from restrictive covenants.

But these factors were not peculiar to Lancashire. They were to be found in various combinations throughout the country, even in the arable areas. "Looking forward to what was coming," Sir John Lawes reluctantly installed a dairy herd and gave up a "great deal of corn growing" at the beginning of the 'seventies.<sup>1</sup> The earl of Leicester, son of the great Coke, aban-

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 1880-82, Q. 57,619 (Sir John Lawes).



doned the four-course, laid down his corn land to grass, and fattened sheep at a profit.<sup>1</sup> Even in East Anglia small farms predominated; in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex taken together, almost a half of the total number of agricultural holdings over 5 acres were under 50 acres in size and less than 10 per cent were over 300 acres. By the eighteen-nineties few parts of the country were beyond the reach of either a local market or the ever spreading demand of the conurbations, in particular that of London. Lord Vernon in the midlands, like Mr Miller of Singleton Park in the Fylde, supplied regular customers with fresh butter at a price higher than that in the retail markets.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, long leases and restrictive covenants were disappearing as opinion turned against them and legislation endeavoured to give formal protection to the annual tenant.

It may be argued that such alternatives were perhaps feasible on the light lands of Hertfordshire and Norfolk but impracticable for heavy land farmers like those on the clays of Essex, acknowledged as the worst hit county. But even in Essex there was scope for initiative.<sup>3</sup> The Scottish dairying on the run-down Essex clay may be paralleled by the less publicized experiences of Lancashire men who took with them, besides milking cows, a tradition of freedom, both from technical dogma and restrictive landlords, a keen eye for opportunities and a willingness to farm according to the dictates of the market. As a Fylde farmer observed after touring Essex, "new-comers are going in for milk, cheese, butter, fruit, and sheep, but with the average Essex farmer it is corn, corn, corn." The prices of milk, butter, and cheese were as good as if not better than in Lancashire, thanks to the proximity of London which constituted a "ready and paying market which they cannot flood." "Look at the hay they want in London," the Fylde man expostulated, "the butter, the beef, the milk, to say nothing of the cheese and eggs. But when we were down in Chelmsford we learnt that the town was often short of milk and didn't hear of any farmer who made cheese."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the fundamental explanation of Lancashire farmers' prosperity during the depression is not the presence of favourable circumstances—after all these did not appear fortuitously—but the character of the farmers themselves. In the eyes of Essex men, Lancashire farmers were "more

<sup>1</sup> *R.C.* 1894-97, C. 7400-IV, Appendix E, pp. 597-8.

<sup>2</sup> *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 21,761, 35,332; *P.G.* 18. 4. 1891.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Hunter Pringle's series of articles on the change from corn to meat and grass in Essex during the eighteen-eighties in the *Agricultural Gazette* of 1887, July onwards, esp. 10. 10. 1887.

<sup>4</sup> *P.G.* 24. 10. 1896: Report of the tour of Essex organized by the *Preston Guardian* for Lancashire farmers; see also September to December inclusive in the same year for accounts of Lancashire emigration to Essex.



boisterous, more energetic in temperament than our people. The same enters into your work, I have noticed. Our folk want to work genteelly; they don't put that energy, that enterprise, that wholehearted zeal into it that you do."<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly the "mercantile enterprise of Liverpool and Manchester merchants . . . imbued the agriculturalists of the district with the same impetus,"<sup>2</sup> but the "pregnant wit"<sup>3</sup> of the Lancastrian long antedated the Industrial Revolution, however subsequently it may have been sharpened by the economic fluctuations of the nineteenth century which not only closed cotton mills but thereby deprived the milk-selling farmer of all his best customers. But granted these virtues in the Lancashire farmer, it can scarcely be maintained that with the exception of a scattered handful beyond the Lyme he enjoyed a monopoly of vision and enterprise. The question thus arises: to what extent was the period really as tragic as the orthodox picture claims? Have the agonized cries of corn-growers and the simple symbolism of the wheat price continued to hypnotize twentieth-century observers as they did nineteenth-century participants? A study of more relevant evidence than that considered by the Royal Commissions of 1880-2 and 1894-7 and viewed with rather more impartial eyes might suggest a radical reappraisal of the accepted view.<sup>4</sup>

## APPENDIX

### A. MILK OUTPUT AND CONSUMPTION

Yields per cow in Lancashire are taken to be greater than those assumed by Dr E. M. Ojala for the U.K. (*Agriculture and Economic Progress*, 1952, pp. 204-5) in view of the greater proportion of specialist milk producers in the county. The general pattern of milk consumption estimates between those of J. C. Morton (*J.R.A.S.*, 1865, 1878) and those of A. R. Prest (*Consumers' Expenditure in the U.K. 1900-1919*, 1954) suggests a rise from about  $\frac{1}{4}$  pint to  $\frac{3}{8}$  pint a head each day. Assuming the more conservative increase of 25 per cent between 1870 and 1894-8 and using *Agricultural Returns* for the number of cows, and Dr Ojala's U.K. estimate of yields, the output of farm butter and cheese in England and Wales appears to have constituted about 45 per cent of total milk production in 1870, falling to 30 per cent in 1894-8 and 23 per cent in 1907 (this latter figure is taken from the *Agricultural Output of Great Britain*,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*      <sup>2</sup> *J.R.A.S.*, xxxviii, 1877, p. 464.

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Mumford, *The Manchester Grammar School, 1515-1915*, 1919, p. 11: in the School Statutes of 1525. Professor Redford kindly drew my attention to this point and provided the reference.

<sup>4</sup> For example, much evidence furnished to the Commission of 1894-7 received scant attention; see the *Minority Reports* of G. Lambert and F. A. Channing, both of whom complained that the majority ignored examples of successful farming.—*Final Report*, pp. 204-376, C. 8540 of 1897.

1908, Cd 6277 of 1912) but with absolute output changing little. For Lancashire with its many liquid milk sellers a proportion of 30 per cent was assumed for 1870 with absolute output unchanged thereafter.

### B. MILK PRICES

(i) Retail. Of 29 Lancashire retail milk quotations covering the Great Depression, 16 give 3d, 5 less than 3d, and 8 over 3d a quart as the ruling price. Prices were higher in the larger towns, reaching 4d at Liverpool, and lower in the more rural areas, but little significant change in the average level of prices occurred until 1909-10 when a general rise to 3½d took place. For sources see *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Courier* for February and March 1872, and *Preston Guardian*, 29. 9. 1892.

It appears that a general rise occurred in or about 1872, a time of rising prices, and that some, if not all, of this increase was lost before 1891 when, as in 1900-1 outside the Liverpool and Manchester areas, the commonest price was 3d a quart. As it is doubtful whether all the gain of 1872 was lost by the 'nineties, e.g. the Manchester price was above 3d in 1897 and 1901 and very probably so in 1891, and as moreover it seems that outside the largest centres of population the price rose to 3d circa 1872 and never thereafter fell, it follows that the retail price of milk could scarcely have fallen between 1867-71 and 1894-8.

For the purpose of Graph B a price of 3d has been taken for 1867-71 rising to 3½d (in practice 3d in summer and 3½d in winter) in 1872 and falling again to 3d in 1886, the trough year of the trade cycle. In corroboration of the view that the retail price was constant over a long period was the practice before 1910 in east Lancashire of using pint measures permanently marked internally into thirds: at a price of 3d a quart, milk could thus conveniently be sold in pennyworths and halfpennyworths (information from Mr E. Fitton of Bury; cf. also *Preston Guardian*, 25. 1. 1936).

(ii) Wholesale. Price quotations of wholesale milk in Lancashire are scarce.

Date	Source	Comment	Price in pence per gallon		
			Summer	Winter	Average
1871-2	<i>Manchester Courier</i> , 14. 2. 1872	near Manchester	6-6½	7-7½	6¾
1876	<i>J.R.A.S.</i>	near Lancaster	-	-	8
1880-2	<i>R.C.</i>	near Stockport	8	10	9
1886	<i>J.R.A.S.</i>	near Lancaster	-	9	(8)
1894	<i>P.G.</i> , 13. 10. 1894	(Blackpool	10	-	-
		(Fylde	7-8	-	-
1897	<i>J.R.A.S.</i>	a Manchester dealer (so probably refers to Cheshire supplies)	6	7½-9	7½

If, as seems probable, quoted prices are those paid by buyers and nominally received by producers, then the fall in rail transport costs between the 'seventies and the 'nineties of approximately ½d per gallon would offset by that amount any fall in price. The evidence is slender, but such as there is falls into the familiar Lancashire product curve pattern, rising in the 'seventies and falling back in the 'eighties. No Lancashire witness before the Royal Commission of 1894-7 who gave evidence in the years 1894 to 1896 complained of a fall in the price of milk, either wholesale or retail. On the contrary, it was specifically stated by the Assistant Commissioner for the county that the "price of milk had not fallen" (*R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 11,396, A. Wilson Fox; and see *Preston Guardian*, 14. 10. 1893); in the context Wilson Fox was referring to the period since the mid-'eighties. The milk price in Cheshire was said to have fallen by about 10 per cent from 1880 to June 1894 (*R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 26,014, T. Parton). Prices at the former date were significantly higher, perhaps 20 per cent, than ten years earlier,

so that after allowing for cheaper carriage it is difficult to see how any overall net fall could have occurred between 1867-71 and 1894-8. It is just possible that some temporary unrecorded reduction took place in 1895 and (or) 1896 in the trough of the general price cycle.

### C. BUTTER AND CHEESE PRICES

(i) Butter. The original series of Lancashire butter prices was taken from the *Wigan Observer* in the absence of any continuous Preston series. It is an annual unweighted average of prices at Wigan market on the first market day of each calendar month throughout the year. The spread of prices on any one day was narrow— $\frac{1}{2}$ d or 1d a lb.; very frequently only one price was quoted. Comparable prices at Ormskirk market were taken from the *Ormskirk Advertiser*; here too the spread was narrow or non-existent. North Cheshire butter and egg prices were published in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Stockport Advertiser* from 1884-5 onwards. Stockport prices moved conformably with those at Wigan and Ormskirk. Prices at Wigan declined by 15 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8; at Ormskirk by only 11 per cent as a result of an advantage that was gained between 1873 and 1876 and never thereafter lost. The Kelsall butter prices, which are an annual average of fifty-two weekly quotations weighted by weekly quantities sold, fit the Ormskirk-Wigan pattern. The average of 1872-77 inclusive = 110 = the average of Wigan prices in the same years; the mean of the 1896 and 1900 prices = 87. It may be tentatively concluded that farm butter prices at Lancashire markets declined by some 13 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8.

(ii) Cheese. No unbroken single source of Lancashire farm cheese prices has been found. Some Preston prices were occasionally published in the *Preston Guardian*. The *Manchester Guardian* quoted prices at various markets, including Lancaster, Preston, Crewe, Derby, Nottingham, and Leicester, sporadically throughout the period. The *Agricultural Gazette* gives some Preston and Lancaster prices between 1888 and 1894. The *Wigan Observer* abandoned the reporting of cheese prices at Wigan after 1882. A Staffordshire cheese factory price series, from 1874 to 1893 inclusive, is the most complete annual series discovered but is of limited value in assessing changes in the price of Lancashire farm cheese.

Market prices were usually quoted for two or three grades, variously defined, but this was not universal. The spread of prices in any one year may be considerable, e.g. William Kelsall made 80s. in May 1875 but only 60s. in October, or again at Preston in 1886 April prices ranged from 50s. to 65s. whilst October prices were 70s. to 80s. As between adjacent districts price movements could vary widely; the *Manchester Guardian* (10. 10. 1892) reported of Chester October fair: "As compared with last year there was a downward tendency of 5s. per cwt. for fine and 10s. to 15s. for other qualities," whereas two days later at Lancaster the "prices realised were from 5s. to 10s. per cwt. more than at the last October fair." A further complication is the suggestion of a shift during the Great Depression from late maturing cheeses which were stored on the farm over winter to the quick-ripening cheese consumed in the season of its manufacture (see *Preston Guardian*, 12. 10. 1895).

In these circumstances the best single series, although incomplete, is that of prices each year at Lancaster autumn fair and this has been graphed. William Kelsall's prices in the eighteen-sixties and 'seventies have also been shown. A price curve of inferior qualities has not been drawn but a decline of some 20 per cent is indicated.

### D. MUTTON AND LAMB PRICES

Mutton and lamb prices are taken from Salford Tuesday market reports published in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Manchester Courier*. Salford was the largest market in the county and dealt mainly in native live sheep; the numbers and prices of foreign and Irish sheep were

usually given separately. The aim has been to obtain a price series applicable to Lancashire sheep, almost all of which were sold off grass; the majority were hill or hill-crosses lambed during March, April, and early May (see *Preston Guardian*, 31. 3. 1894). In some years, particularly the later, *Manchester Guardian* reports are sufficiently detailed to provide a seasonal picture of sources of supply. The best representation of Lancashire prices is obtained by averaging weekly prices during July to October inclusive. Prior to July few Lancashire lambs were marketed, and there is, moreover, the difficulty of distinguishing shorn sheep from those "in the wool;" after October numbers at the market fall off rapidly.

Prices were quoted in pence per pound except occasionally when lambs were quoted per head. Graph B is the mean of two price series, one for lamb and the other for mutton, excluding imported sheep but including ewes. A typical October report reads (*Manchester Guardian*, 3. 10. 1894): "good Cheviot wethers and well finished North Country lambs 8½, strong North Country sheep 7½-8, Cheviot and Half-Bred ewes 6½-6¾, 1st class Irish wethers 7½, heavy ditto 6¾-7¼, ewes 6; (number at market 10,376)."

## Letter to the Editor

### HITTING SHEEP ON THE NOSE

SIR,—As a boy in 1941 I watched sheep being dipped at Buckden in Upper Wharfedale, Yorkshire, and was intrigued to see the shepherd give each one a sharp knock at the base of the snout with a stone. This observation remained in my memory without explanation until I began to work with sheep at the Wool Industries Research Association ten years later. A colleague there said that he had observed this custom in Nidderdale, Yorkshire, about 1953, and had been given the explanation by those who carried it out, that young sheep were hit in this way in order to prevent a bone in the skull from developing at the expense of the rest of the body. A young sheep farmer of Bell Busk, near Malham, Yorkshire, told me in 1956 that he had carried out this practice, and gave a similar explanation, but said that he no longer agreed with it.

Mr K. J. Towers, senior lecturer in veterinary science at Leeds University, told me that he was familiar with the custom, which in fact breaks the outer plate of the frontal bone, but he considered that there was no basis for the belief that this would allow better growth of the body. Such primitive customs

often do have a basis, and Mr T. Mason of Reynard Ing, Ilkley, also familiar with the practice, gave me the interesting suggestion that damage of the frontal region might stimulate growth by causing an increased secretion of pituitary growth hormone. There is no evidence that this could happen, but a stress mechanism involving hormone secretions is triggered-off by bone fracture, and this could conceivably influence the metabolic state of the animal.

I write, however, to put this almost extinct custom on record, and also to inquire whether others have seen it in other parts of Britain, or seen references to it in old agricultural works. Associate Professor J. V. Evans of this Faculty met a farmer in Cumberland who spoke of this custom and explained that it was to remove bot from the nasal passages, as well as to prevent attack from this parasite, the larva of *Oestrus ovis*. The books, such as Youatt (1837), with which I am familiar make no mention of the practice, although Youatt gives detailed descriptions of various methods for the removal of bot by wire and other instruments.

(continued on page 54)

# East Yorkshire's Agricultural Labour Force in the mid-Nineteenth Century

By JUNE A. SHEPPARD

AN interesting aspect of agricultural history about which we have little information is the size and composition of the agricultural labour force. Some general impressions may be obtained from records of specific farms or estates at certain dates, but comprehensive information for extensive areas, that would allow regional comparisons to be made, is less frequently available. This limitation is as marked for the nineteenth century as for earlier periods. The agricultural writers often describe the labour position on particular farms, but these were frequently chosen for their special characteristics, and cannot be regarded as typical of their own regions, let alone the many parts where quite different types of farming occurred. It was not until 1921 that farmers were required to indicate on the June 4th returns how many labourers were employed, and even this information is not so full as we would wish, for no distinction was made between different types of workers, and members of the farmer's own family were not included.

There is, however, a source of information concerning the agricultural labour force which can be used, in conjunction with other sources, to give a reasonably detailed and accurate picture of conditions in the middle years of the nineteenth century. This is the manuscript books of the enumerators for the 1851 census.<sup>1</sup> These books provide very full information on the composition of the population in every township of England and Wales. The date is a particularly convenient one for the study of the agricultural labour force, for the rural population was then at about its peak, and farming was relatively prosperous, but the mechanization of agriculture had hardly begun. Hence the numbers employed in agriculture were at about their maximum.

The 1851 Enumerators' Books have been analysed for the East Riding of Yorkshire, a county which has the advantage of a variety of soils and types of farming, and where therefore some regional contrasts in the size and composition of the labour force would be expected.

## THE ENUMERATORS' BOOKS

It is essential before considering the results of an analysis of the Enumerators' Books to assess the reliability and limitations of the data. Each

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 107.

township was enumerated separately, and within the township each household was numbered and clearly distinguished. For each member of the household, the details given were name, relationship to head of household, age, sex, marital status, occupation, and place of birth. Additional information of considerable relevance is given for farmers: the acreage farmed and the number of workers employed.

Agricultural workers are easily recognized in the occupation column, and three main groups may be distinguished. First, there are farmers and their male relatives working on the farm. The principal difficulty of interpretation in connection with this group arises from the prestige that was associated with the term farmer, which led to many persons with only a few acres giving themselves this title. It was therefore decided to set a limit at five acres, and those called farmers but having less than five acres of land were classed as agricultural labourers (unless an alternative additional occupation was given). The limit was not imposed, however, when the occupation was 'gardener' or 'market-gardener', as it is likely that such a person was engaged full-time in working his land. In imposing an arbitrary size limit some inaccurate classification must inevitably result, but this is unlikely to be very great, as small part-time farmers were not common in the East Riding at this date.

The second group of workers distinguished was the agricultural labourers. Shepherds have been included with these, and also gardeners for whom no acreage was given (on the assumption that these were garden labourers rather than masters). Certain occupations with agricultural affinities, such as mole-catchers and ditchers and drainers, have been excluded from consideration.

The third group comprised the farm servants. These were usually called farm servants in the occupation column, but sometimes they were described more precisely as ploughboys, waggoners, etc. The group is always clearly identified, however, by the fact that they are enumerated with the farmer's household, and under the column for relationship with head of household were always termed 'servant'.

The number of the three main classes of agricultural workers living in each township in 1851 can therefore be readily, if laboriously, determined. Very few women worked regularly in the fields of the East Riding, except in the extreme south-west, so the analysis has been confined to male workers only.

Many more problems are involved in using the information given concerning the acreage worked by each farmer and the number of labourers employed. The first limitation of the acreage figures is that they are missing



for some farmers, usually when the farm was run by a bailiff (rare in east Yorkshire), or when other evidence suggests that the farm was small. Some 90 per cent or more of the farms are given an acreage, however, and this would seem to provide a valid basis for calculating average farm size, except in a few townships where the proportion missing was much greater than usual. The second limitation is that we have no internal check on the accuracy of the acreages given. In some parts of the country gross inaccuracies occur,<sup>1</sup> but when a comparison was made for fourteen East Riding townships between the acreages given in the Enumerators' Books and those recorded in the Tithe Awards of the 1840's, only small discrepancies occurred, and these could be explained by the interval of time between the two records. This suggests that the farm sizes given are sufficiently accurate to warrant comparisons between different townships.

The value of the employment figures is limited by the fact that they, too, are not given for all farms, and it is sometimes impossible to tell whether the absence of a figure indicates that no workers were employed, or whether it means that the numbers were for some reason not recorded. In most cases the size of farm gives some indication as to which is the correct interpretation, and once again the details are sufficiently full for about 90 per cent of the farms. The number given referred to the workers employed on Monday March 31, a time of year which probably represented average employment conditions; there is no record of the additional large numbers of women and children employed at harvest time. The biggest problem in using these 'employed' figures is to decide which groups of workers are included. The instructions were that both 'in-labourers'—i.e. farm servants, and 'out-labourers'—i.e. agricultural labourers, should be specified, and in some townships this was done. More frequently, however, the formula used was 'farmer of (214) acres employing (12).' At first sight a single 'employed' figure would appear to be the total of farm servants and agricultural labourers, but detailed examination of the figures shows that in many cases this interpretation is impossible. In many townships the farm servant total was almost as great as the 'employed' total, and in a few townships their numbers exceeded the 'employed' total. The most likely interpretation therefore seems to be that a single 'employed' figure refers to agricultural labourers only.<sup>2</sup> A check on this is provided by relating the 'employed' total for the county to the number of agricultural labourers; if both referred to the same type of worker, the figures should be approximately the same. They were:

<sup>1</sup> e.g. in Devonshire (information from Mr W. M. Williams).

<sup>2</sup> The introduction to the printed Census reports for 1851 admits that "some uncertainty prevails as to whether the farmers returned all their in-door servants." p. lxxviii.

'employed', approximately 10,200; agricultural labourers, approximately 10,900. The difference of 700 amounts to roughly two labourers per township, readily accounted for by temporary unemployment, and employment on farms for which no 'employed' figure is given.

It would therefore appear that in the 1851 Census Enumerators' Books we have a source of information which, in spite of limitations, is of an order of reliability that makes detailed analysis worth-while and valid.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS

It is possible to calculate the average acreage worked per individual for each township by dividing the total acreage of farm land by the total of family workers, farm servants, and 'employed'. One would expect a high acreage per worker on less productive soils, and a low acreage per worker on fertile soils.

The majority of East Riding townships in 1851 had averages of between twenty and thirty acres per worker. Very few had under fifteen or over forty acres per worker. There was a certain broad correlation with soil conditions. The highest acreages per worker, for example, occurred in townships on the high chalk Wolds, on the sticky lacustrine clays of the Vale of York, and on the heavier boulder-clay tracts of Holderness, whilst the lowest acreages per worker were found especially where the fertile silt soils fringe the Ouse. The correspondence with soil type was, however, far from complete. This is because the density of workers reflected not only soil fertility, but also farm size, and while the latter was itself to some extent related to soil fertility, it was also profoundly influenced by the historical evolution of land-ownership, which varied from township to township. Where numerous small farms were the rule, there was a tendency for more workers to be employed than were strictly necessary, while large farms led to a more economic use of labour and a large acreage per worker. Table I illustrates this relationship.

The average acreage per worker is of interest since it represents the approximate peak of employment in agriculture, and gives a ratio of workers to agricultural land two or three times greater than the present-day British average.

#### COMPOSITION OF THE LABOUR FORCE

The three classes that formed the agricultural labour force were quite distinctive in many ways. Although farmers ranged in age from the early twenties to the eighties, there was a preponderance in the 30-60 age group. The household composition suggests that it was the accepted social pattern for all sons to work on the farm from the time of leaving school until marriage, and the considerable number of unmarried brothers living and working on

TABLE I

	Township	Average farm size	Acres per worker
Fertile silts	Barmby Marsh	44	13
	Sunk Island	417	31
Less fertile Wolds	Langtoft	181	25
	Towthorpe	825	34

farms shows that family co-operation often persisted after the death of the father. The small number of retired farmers recorded by the enumerators indicates that most died in harness.

The majority of agricultural labourers were the heads of cottage households, and ranged in age from the early twenties to the eighties. These were the workers who were paid by the day or by the week, or at harvest time by piece-work. Legard, in his Prize Essay written three years before the Census, recorded that their average pay from Martinmas (November 11) to Candlemas (February 2) was 12s. a week, and from Candlemas to harvest time 13s. 6d. to 14s. a week.<sup>1</sup> During the harvest period they could earn several shillings more than the highest weekly rate. It is interesting to note that Legard considered the East Riding labourers to be among the best-paid in England. Cottage rents were between £3 and £6 a year, so that about one tenth of the labourer's income was spent on accommodation. Many labourers were the fathers of large families of young children, and in spite of their relatively favourable rates of pay compared with those of labourers in the south of England they must have had a very low standard of living.

With such pressure on resources, it is not surprising that the labourers' children were put to work at a relatively early age, though not so early as in counties farther south where adult wages were lower. The 1867 Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons, and Women in Agriculture reported that the East Riding children started work in the fields when they were eight or nine years old, but at this age they usually worked only in spring and summer, and especially at harvest time.<sup>2</sup> From November to March many attended school intermittently; thus almost every child under the age of thirteen was recorded in the occupation column of the Enumerators' Books as 'scholar'. Between the ages of twelve and fourteen, however,

<sup>1</sup> G. Legard, 'Farming in the East Riding of Yorkshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, ix, 1848, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> First Report, 1868, p. 96.

nearly all left home, thus relieving the pressure on sleeping accommodation in the cottages, where there were rarely more than two bedrooms. The girls entered into service either in the countryside with farmer or master-craftsman households or in nearby towns, while the boys were recruited to the ranks of the farm servants.

Farm servants were hired and paid yearly, and received free board and lodging: "the farmer's house is like a barrack with a long chamber full of beds, one of which the foreman commonly occupies to keep order and rouse the men in the morning."<sup>1</sup> The young men started as ploughboys, receiving between £8 and £12 a year by the age of sixteen, while later they became waggoners and earned £14-20 a year. Foremen received up to £25.<sup>2</sup> Most farm servants married after about ten or twelve years of the life, and changed their status to agricultural labourers. The average age of this class of agricultural workers was therefore low, although the foremen were usually older, often either bachelors or widowers.

For the county as a whole, agricultural labourers were the most numerous group, forming 43 per cent of the total labour force; farm servants formed 33 and family labour 24 per cent. There were, however, considerable regional contrasts in these proportions and Figures I, II, and III show for each group those townships where the proportions were higher than the county average. Family workers (Fig. I) were especially important in the Vale of York (the lowland west of the Wolds), and in some townships there they formed more than 40 per cent of the total labour force. Parts of Holderness also had more than the county average of 24 per cent, but the proportions were rarely so high as in the west. Both agricultural labourers (Fig. II) and farm servants (Fig. III) were proportionately more important on the Wolds and in some parts of Holderness. Agricultural labourers rarely exceeded 60 per cent of the total labour force, but farm servants showed a greater variation from the average, with over 50 per cent of the total in several townships.

Farm size must be the first factor taken into account when seeking an explanation of these patterns of distribution. Small farms, often under fifty acres, were particularly numerous in the Vale of York, both on the fertile silt soils adjoining the Ouse and on the light sandy soils of the interior of the Vale. Although the land was worked intensively, rarely were more than four or five workers employed on one farm, and the family would usually supply several of these. Since these small farms were frequently in or close to the villages, the additional labour required was normally provided by agricultural labourers rather than by farm servants, who formed only a small proportion of the labour force of most Vale townships. Large farms (300 acres

<sup>1</sup> First Report, 1868, p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> Legard, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

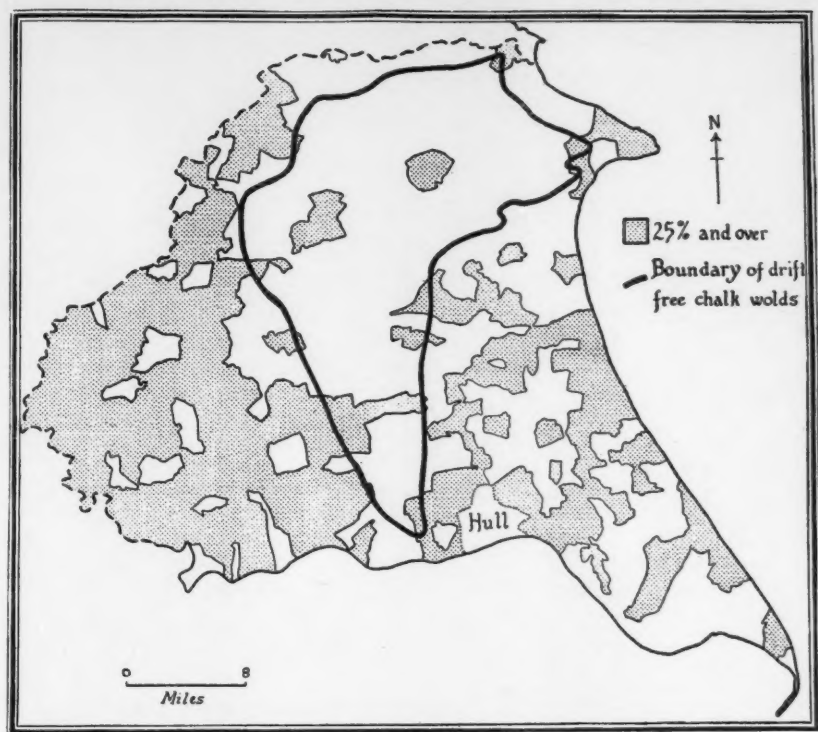


FIG. I  
Family Workers

and over) predominated on the Wolds and in parts of Holderness, each requiring at least ten workers and often twenty or thirty. The family could provide only a small proportion of these, therefore many labourers and farm servants were employed. The relative importance of servants and labourers varied with the location of the farm; farms in villages had fewer servants than isolated farms. It was always convenient to have workers close at hand, and while the village farmer could rely on his labourers living just down the street, the farmer remote from a village had to board his workers to make sure of this convenience. The isolated farmhouses that were built in the fields after the Parliamentary enclosures were also as a rule larger than the village farmhouses and more suitable for the boarding of farm servants. In most cases the distinction between the two types of location is lost in the township totals, but in those townships without a village (e.g. the 'lost villages' of

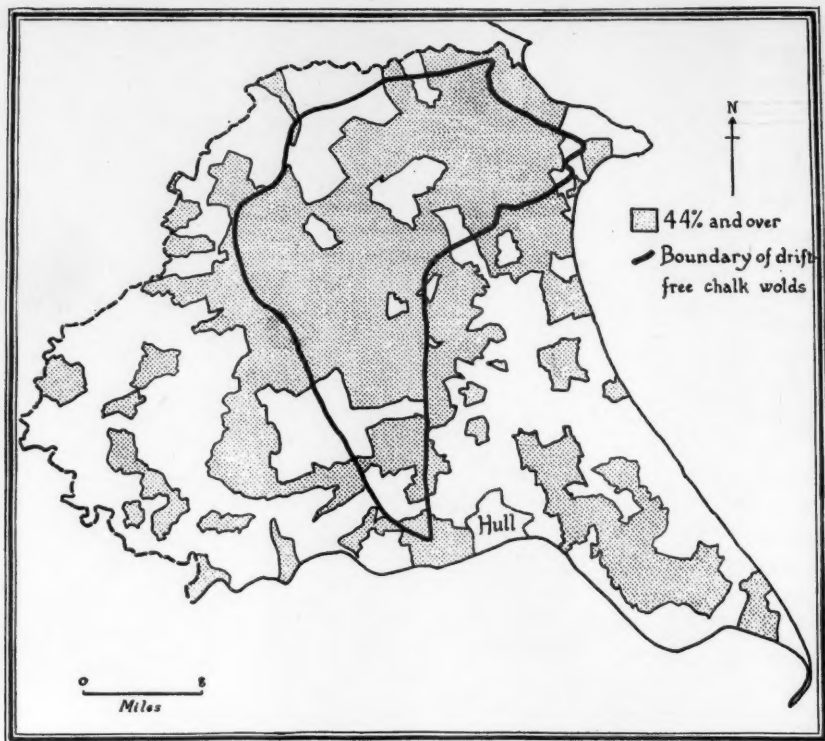


FIG. II  
Agricultural Labourers

Towthorpe, Cowlam, Cottam, and Wharram Percy, and the newly-reclaimed Sunk Island) the proportion of farm servants was especially high.

Although small farms and a great use of family labour were characteristic of much of the Vale of York, and large farms and a preponderance of farm servants and agricultural labourers typical of much of the Wolds, there were some townships in both areas that were exceptions. Sutton-on-Derwent and Woodhouse in the Vale of York had larger farms and relied more on farm servants and agricultural labourers than their neighbours, while Langtoft on the Wolds had more small farms and family workers were more important than in surrounding townships. Such exceptions do not, however, detract from the clear regional emphasis of the two tracts. Holderness, in contrast, had no distinctive pattern of its own. In size of farms and composition of labour force it was closer to the county average than the other two regions,



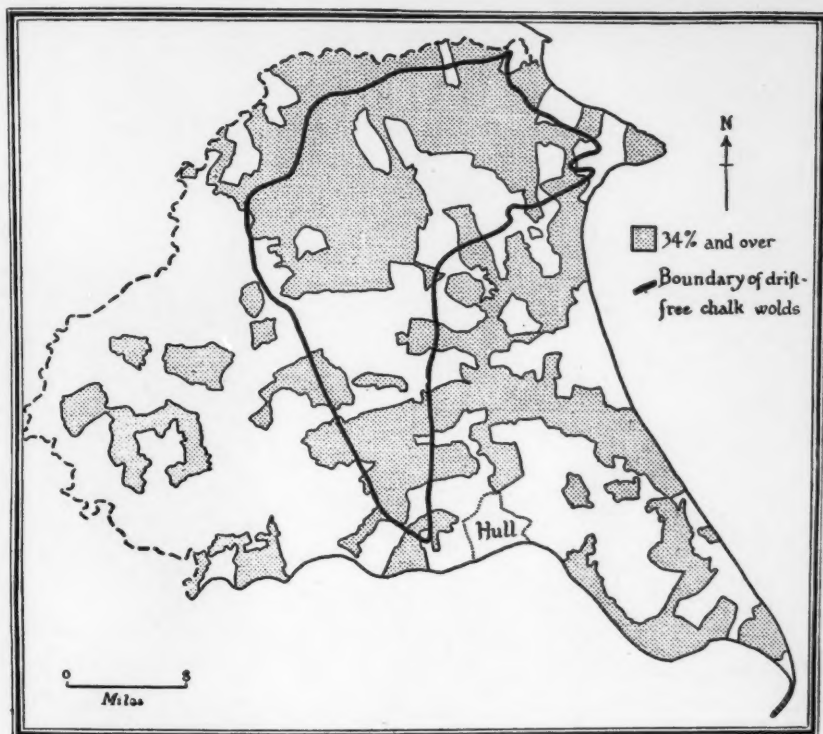


FIG. III  
Farm Servants

and the differences from part to part brought out by Figures I, II, and III represent much smaller variations from the average than occurred in the other two regions.

#### THE LABOURER'S JOURNEY TO WORK

Whereas family workers and farm servants lived at their place of work, the majority of the labourers' cottages were in the villages. In some parts of the county, especially on the high Wolds, the villages were three or four miles apart, and this perforce involved those labourers working on the more remote farms in daily walks of up to four miles to and from their work. Frequently, however, even longer daily journeys were undertaken, for many labourers lived in the village of one township, but worked on farms in other townships. The First Report of the Commission on the Employment of

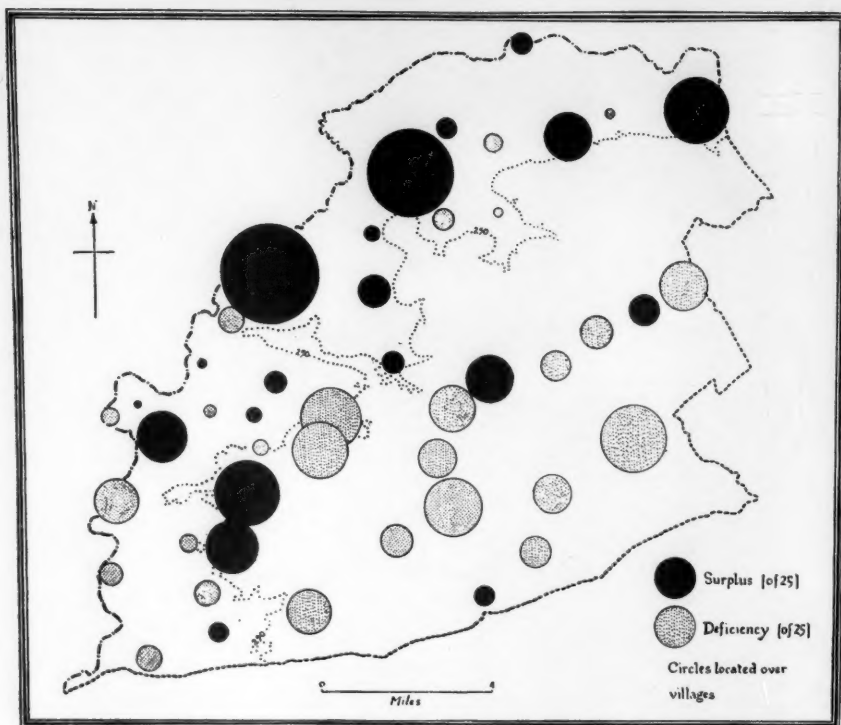


FIG. IV

Surplus and Deficit of Agricultural Labourers by Townships in N.W. East Yorkshire

Children, Young Persons, and Women in Agriculture made several references to such movements; for example, the vicar of North Frodingham told the Commission "my parish supplies neighbouring parishes with labour, some of the labourers have long distances to walk to their work."<sup>1</sup>

The details contained in the 1851 Enumerators' Books make it possible to obtain a more complete picture of this inter-township movement of agricultural labourers. A comparison of the total 'employed' in each township with the number of resident agricultural labourers reveals that while in some half of the townships there is a reasonably close correlation between the two figures, in the remainder there is a considerable difference. Where a difference occurs, an excess of 'employed' over resident labourers suggests that some of the 'employed' had to live elsewhere, whilst an excess of resident

<sup>1</sup> First Report, 1868, p. 371.

labourers over 'employed' suggests that some of the residents had to find work outside the township. As might be expected, surplus townships and deficit townships were fairly closely intermingled, especially in Holderness. There was, however, a concentration of townships with a deficit of resident labourers on the Wolds, and of townships with a surplus in the Vale of York and along the margins of the Wolds. Figure IV shows the detailed pattern in the north-west of the county, with the 250-ft contour picking out the approximate margin of the Wolds. Most of the Wolds townships included on the map had deficits of between twenty and fifty labourers, and the three townships with surpluses within the region could not have made good the whole of the deficit. Rather must the additional workers have been drawn from the several townships on the margins of the Wolds with large surpluses of forty or more labourers. The distance between the villages with an excess of labourers and the areas of deficit indicates that some labourers must have walked at least four miles from their homes to their places of work.

The long distance between home and work was disadvantageous to both farmer and labourer, for the walk was tiring, and reduced the labourer's value as a worker. It was no doubt at least partly in order to overcome this disadvantage that the practice had developed on the Wolds of providing three meals a day at the farm for the labourers.<sup>1</sup> Such day-labourers with board received wages approximately one-third less than day-labourers without board. Many did not bother to walk home and back every night, especially in bad weather, but slept at the farm; a Neswick farmer told the 1867 Commission: "I provide beds for the men if they want them, they usually go home on Wednesday and Saturday."<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to calculate from the Census how many adopted this practice, for it was taken on a Sunday night when virtually all labourers would have been at home. Many shepherds, however, spent the whole of the lambing season at the farm, and were recorded there at the time of the Census (March 30), while many village shepherd households were enumerated beginning with the shepherd's wife.

The lack of coincidence of labour supply and demand may be explained as deriving from the operation of the Poor Laws.<sup>3</sup> Where ratepayers were few ('close parishes') no new cottages were erected and some of the old ones were pulled down so that the poor-rates could be kept low, and many labourers were forced to live outside the township. This tendency was especially strong on the Wolds, where the changes brought about by the Agricultural Revolution of the late eighteenth century had given rise to an increased

<sup>1</sup> *Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, pp. 324, 329.

<sup>2</sup> First Report, 1868, p. 379.

<sup>3</sup> 1867 Commission, First Report, 1868, p. 105.

demand for labour at a time when concern about poor-rates was especially marked. Where a township contained many ratepayers ('open parish'), agreement on limiting the number of cottages was less likely, and in fact many small freeholders erected rows of cottages for the labourers who could not find homes in the 'close' townships. In this way originated the practice of long journeys to work for the less favourably situated labourers.

#### CONCLUSION

This study of the composition of the agricultural labour force in the East Riding of Yorkshire in 1851 has revealed certain regional patterns. The main contrast is between the Vale of York and the Wolds. In the Vale of York there was a relatively high density of workers, and family workers played a very important rôle, while few townships (apart from those fringing the Wolds) showed either a marked excess or a marked deficit of agricultural labourers. On the Wolds, a lower density of workers was associated with a greater reliance on farm servants and agricultural labourers, many of the latter having to travel considerable distances from their village homes fringing the chalk uplands. Holderness had a more mixed and intermediate character. Until the statistics for further areas have been analysed it is impossible to say how far the characteristics exhibited by any of these regions were paralleled in other parts of England.

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#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR (*continued from page 42*)

It is noteworthy that the localities in which the custom took place are in the Pennine and Cumbrian hill regions; a friend who is familiar with sheep in the East Riding of Yorkshire never saw it there. Mr M. M. MacKinnon, senior lecturer in preventive medicine in this Faculty, never heard of the custom in Devon,

and it does not appear to have reached Australia and New Zealand.

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Compiled by JOAN THIRSK

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CORRECTION: An entry in last year's bibliography under FUSSELL, G. E., should read *Low Countries' Influence on English farming*. Eng. Hist. Rev., vol. LXXIV.

## Notes and Comments

### CHANGE IN CONSTITUTION

At the Annual General Meeting of the Society held at Harper Adams Agricultural College, the following additional section to the Constitution was adopted:

"The Executive Committee may from time to time co-opt a regional conference secretary or secretaries. Such secretaries shall remain members of the Committee from the date of co-option until the meeting following the conference which they were co-opted to organize."

As a result of this change the Constitution of the Society is now as follows:

1. The Society shall be named The British Agricultural History Society.

2. The object of the Society shall be to promote the study of the history of agriculture and rural economy.

3. Membership of the Society shall be open to all persons interested. Candidates for membership shall be nominated by any member of the Society and all such nominations shall be approved by the Executive Committee.

4. The annual subscription shall be one guinea, due on 1 February.

5. The business of the Society shall be conducted by its Officers and by the Executive Committee.

6. The Officers of the Society shall consist of a President, Chairman of the Executive, Treasurer, and Secretary. The President, Treasurer, and Secretary shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting. The Chairman of the Executive shall be elected by that committee from among its members.

7. The Executive Committee shall consist of twelve members of the Society elected by the Annual General Meeting with the addition of the Officers and the Editor who shall be ex-officio members of the Committee. Five members of the Executive Committee shall form a quorum.

8. The President, Treasurer, and Secretary and one quarter of the ordinary members of the Executive Committee shall retire at each Annual General Meeting. The retiring ordinary members shall not be eligible for immediate re-election.

9. Nominations, with the consent of the nominee, for the offices of President, Treasurer, and Secretary and for the vacancies on the Executive Committee must be received by the Secretary not less than seven days before the Annual General Meeting.

10. The Annual General Meeting shall be held as near as possible to 1 February. At least twenty-one and not more than twenty-eight days' notice of the Annual General Meeting shall be sent to members of the Society.

11. The Executive Committee shall appoint the Editor who shall have full discretion concerning the content of publications authorized by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee in consultation with the Editor may appoint an Editorial Board.

12. No amendments to this Constitution shall be made except by an Annual General Meeting. All proposals for the amendment of the Constitution shall be submitted in the form of a written notice of motion in time to be circulated to the members with the notice of the Annual General Meeting. No amend-

ment shall be made except by the Annual General Meeting and members unable to attend such a meeting may vote by proxy.

13. All profits derived from publications which the Society may issue and all interest arising from investments which the Society may make shall be devoted to the furtherance of the object of the Society as set out in paragraph 2 of this Constitution.

14. The Executive Committee may from time to time co-opt a regional conference secretary or secretaries. Such secretaries shall remain members of the Committee from the date of co-option until the meeting following the conference which they were co-opted to organize.

#### DECEMBER CONFERENCE

The December conference was again held jointly with the Association of Agriculture and took place on 3 December at the London University Institute of Education. The President of the Society, Sir Keith Murray, presided, and the conference was the best attended for some years. At the morning session Mr Michael Havinden of the Reading University Museum of English Rural Life gave a paper on Agricultural Progress in Open-Field Oxfordshire. After lunch Mr John Saville, Senior Lecturer in Economic History at Hull University, spoke on Public Opinion and Agricultural Depression, 1880-1900. Mr Saville's paper was followed by a film, *The Harvest Shall Come*, which told the story of the farm worker between 1900 and 1940: it was made in 1942 by Imperial Chemical Industries.

#### AMERICAN AGRICULTURAL HISTORY SOCIETY JOINT MEMBERSHIP SCHEME

Arrangements have been made with the Agricultural History Society of America for a joint subscription scheme with the British Agricultural History Society. Members of

our Society who wish to join the American one may do so by notifying the Secretary of the British Agricultural History Society to this effect. Joint members will then pay one compound sum to the British Society each year to cover both subscriptions.

The American Society, in addition to holding conferences, publishes the journal *Agricultural History* which comes out four times a year; it is now in its thirty-fifth volume. A subscription to the Society which includes the cost of *Agricultural History* is 38s. Joint members will therefore pay a subscription of 59s. annually. The scheme is open to Library members of the British Agricultural History Society as well as ordinary members.

#### ECONOMIC HISTORY CONFERENCE

The first International Conference of Economic History was held in August 1960 in Stockholm. One of the two days of the Conference was devoted to the discussion of large-scale agricultural enterprise since the end of the Middle Ages. The *rapporteur* for this session was Professor F. Lütge of the University of Munich. The Conference was attended by some fifty British delegates and a volume of contributions and communications has been published. This includes the following papers which may be of interest to members of the Society:

J. D. CHAMBERS, *Industrialization as a factor in economic growth in England, 1700-1900*;

GEORGES DUBY, *Le grand domaine de la fin du Moyen Age en France*;

V. M. LAVROVSKY, *The great estate in England from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries*;

F. M. L. THOMPSON, *English great estates in the nineteenth century*.

The contributions are published under the imprint of École Pratique des Hautes Études of the Sorbonne by Mouton & Co., The Hague, Holland.

## Book Reviews

ERIC JOHN, *Land Tenure in Early England*.  
Leicester University Press, 1960. xii+184  
pp. 30s.

Mr John's book is very much like Early England itself. It begins, as does our detailed knowledge of Old English society, with the introduction of written documents by Christian missionaries, and especially with the appearance of the land-book, the formal diploma; and it seems to end, although in fact it does not, with the Norman Conquest. Like Early England it is divided by the period of the Scandinavian invasions, dark and uncertain; and, again, it is uncommonly difficult to understand. If its arguments can be summarized without doing violence to their subtleties, its thesis is that the Anglo-Saxons were more like their contemporaries in Europe than they are generally supposed to have been. That may seem a simple enough conclusion, but it portends some elaborate consequences.

The only simple thing about the earliest English land-books is that those which survive have a common ancestry: they mark an innovation made by Archbishop Theodore and his followers in the seventh century, and they share an Italian tradition. Their object is to secure the rights of the recently established and endowed Christian Church, and to this end they employ the formulas of Roman law. It has long been agreed that the Roman conveyance lies behind the English land-book, but as the land-book is held not to be a conveyance and Anglo-Saxon society not Roman, the connection is taken to be very indirect and artificial. Recent work, however, and in particular Professor E. Levy's *West Roman Vulgar Law*, has shown that the Vulgar law of the late Empire was a coherent code very different from the Civil law that Justinian's advisers codified, and now Mr John argues cogently that it is from this law and not from Roman law in the commonly accepted sense that the formulas of the land-books were drawn.

Anything that diminishes the apparent differences between the Anglo-Saxons and their contemporaries in Europe is important, and even to recognize contemporary instead of archaic phrases in an imported legal instrument is an interesting matter. But Mr John makes wider claims than this for the land-books, and he argues that their purpose is not merely to protect the Church's title in a society in which the clergy were powerful and enviable interlopers, but to confer upon the Church a privilege denied to all men bound by the law of the English Folk: the right of perpetual succession.

This argument covers the first three chapters, and is really the heart of the book. If primitive English law allowed only a precarious tenure to those who enjoyed land—as opposed to those who worked it—our notions of early English society will have to be radically changed. The small freeholder has always been a vague and troublesome figure; if Mr John is right, continuous tenure would be originally a mark of inferiority, the condition of those whose rents and produce the king allotted to the warriors who served him. There would be nothing to prevent the warriors' sons from succeeding them after their own apprenticeship in arms, for hereditary succession is often as convenient as the desire for it is natural, but for a long time it would be a succession sanctified by usage and not by right, just as in later centuries villein tenements passed from generation to generation in defiance of the best legal opinion.

This practice would account for the silence of the earliest English laws, which are manifestly concerned with the impact of the Church upon Kentish society, about inheritance of land; a silence maintained, as Mr John points out, in the later seventh century, when the Church's acquisitions must have encroached substantially upon those inalienable family lands that the Folk Law, according to our received theories, rigorously maintained. In fact the Church's privileges seem

to have had a quite different effect. An assured succession in perpetuity was so attractive that laymen coveted book-right, and it is suggested here that the "fraudulent monasteries" that scandalized Bede were ordinary estates that took on the name of religious houses to secure the privileges of *ius hereditarium*, much as private estates today are made limited companies to avoid the rigours of death duties. Bede describes these estates and their lords as "useful neither to God nor to men," commenting that they provide neither religious nor military service; but it looks very much as though freedom from secular service was not the chief attraction of the pseudo-monasteries, but rather a bonus from the right of perpetual succession.

It is difficult at first sight to associate precarious tenure with social privilege, but what looks precarious to the nineteenth-century (one cannot say the twentieth-century) freeholder could well seem safe enough to its own age. The man who enjoyed a *precarium* secured it and might well secure it for his child by his services, and no services mattered more, or were more highly rewarded in primitive times, than military services. The Church's new rights, as Mr John describes them, did great damage to the traditional pattern of military obligation and its rewards, because when the Church was granted perpetual succession the sanctions that made precarious tenure tolerable had to be abandoned with the limited title. As military and other public services formed the basis of the only tenure known to the privileged orders, they ceased when an entirely new tenure was introduced; and the second phase of the history of book-right sees the public services, the 'common burdens' of building fortresses, repairing bridges, and making military expeditions, imposed upon the Church's lands. Once that was done, book-right could be enjoyed by laymen without the scandals that Bede condemns. This reading makes the origins of the common burdens particularly important, and as on the present evidence they seem to have been imposed on book-land in Mercia in the later eighth century, the vital

importance of that mysterious kingdom in Old English studies is emphasized yet again.

With book-right effectively modified and available to laymen, as Mr John argues, the Old English kings were free to reorganize their military power, and under the stress of the Scandinavian wars they did so in the late tenth century. The system that emerges is a familiar one, but since Round's day it has been attributed to the Conqueror. The last four chapters of the book argue that the late pre-Conquest *fyrd* involved a mounted feudal host, that thethane's standard holding of five hides matched the later knight's fee, and that the effective unit was the 'shipful' of sixty knights or thanes, for which some great tenants like the bishop of Worcester answered from their estates. The argument is based upon a study of the *Altitonantis* charter, a critical edition of which is printed in an appendix, and upon St Oswald's *Indiculum*, which is taken—as the Domesday commissioners seem also to have taken it—as an authentic statement of the services that were imposed upon the Oswaldslow tenants when the liberty was created, and thereafter were owed to the king through the bishop. This section is self-contained, but it derives from the author's primary thesis that the oldest English law recognized only precarious tenure.

The whole book challenges the orthodox interpretation of Old English society, and it is evidently not long enough to substantiate such a challenge in detail. Mr John offers a hypothesis that is novel and startling, but that promises to account for the diffuse and enigmatic evidence that we have; its merits will have to be argued both in detail and in general terms. There is still a great deal of work to be done on the surviving Old English charters, on the laws, and on Anglo-Saxon society, particularly the aristocracy. If Round's theory of knight service is to be undone the relation of the post-Conquest quotas to what can be discovered about pre-Conquest hidation will still have to be explained. The debate is likely to be acrimonious; Mr John is almost as hard upon Round as Round was upon his con-

temporaries, and he disagrees on various matters with an imposing number of authorities. In a number of places, too, his style is likely to generate more heat than light. Whatever its outcome, this book is of the highest interest to every one concerned with the history of English land and its law, and to none more than the members of the Agricultural History Society. They will notice, as they read it, that there is one historian whose judgements are very tolerant, if we may put it that way round, of Mr John's—F. W. Maitland. Of the riding services at Oswaldslow, Mr John says quite justly "Maitland was not in error, he confused nothing, and his arguments have warrant from the texts; indeed they have never been refuted." That is a comforting conclusion for any one testing a theory in Old English history; it may stand its author in good stead.

GEOFFREY MARTIN

A. H. DENNEY (ed.), *The Sibton Abbey Estates: select documents, 1325-1509*. Suffolk Records Society, Vol. II, 1960. 172 pp.

This is a most commendable production of the new Suffolk Record Society. The volume introduces us to the records of a small Cistercian abbey in the eastern part of the country, which for a house of its size and insignificance seems to have left behind a remarkably interesting set of estate documents. By no means all of the records are published here, only a useful selection intended to illustrate the evolution of agrarian economy between the early part of the fourteenth and the end of the sixteenth century. These consist of detailed extents of 1325, rent rolls of 1328 and 1484, and account rolls of 1363-4 and 1508-9. Mr Denney gives, however, an account of the unprinted documents, and uses some of them for his introduction. Among the most enticing to which he refers are field books of the early seventeenth century, consisting of abstracts of court rolls for matters of custom and title, and which provide evidence going back to the fourteenth century for the accumulation of tenants' holdings. It is clear that all this evidence could provide the foundation for a

most instructive study in East Anglian agrarian history. Mr Denney does not, of course, attempt to do this. His introduction is an extended comment on the documents printed. Since he deals with them in sequence, for instance describing the expenses part of the accounts after he has dealt with the receipt side, his treatment, though useful and suggestive, is not as readable as if he had been a little more synthesizing. He does, however, draw attention to most of the matters which make the documents of interest to the historian, and this is, after all, what an editor should do.

Readers of these documents will naturally be interested to see what light they throw on Suffolk agrarian peculiarities, but also on the special characteristics of a Cistercian estate. It is, of course, important not to confuse the two. Although there was quite an income from tenants, it seems pretty clear that there was no close association between tenures and demesne. One would expect this situation where the Cistercian grange system was employed. The demesne land is described in very satisfactory detail in the extents of 1325. Much of it was enclosed or at least held in severalty. Rental value per acre varied considerably and very often a comment explains why. Low-value land is *dura* or *petrosa et debilis*, while high rented land is often described as being fit for all types of grain. The account of 1363-4 shows that although leasing of demesnes had begun, the abbey still had much land in hand. The income from sales of produce exceeded rent income substantially and this was still the case in 1372 (Mr Denney's table should distinguish arrears from assize rents), though there were, of course, fluctuations.

A substantial element in estate income came from sheep. The fourteenth-century flock was about 2,000. When sheep grazing fell off and abbey income was derived mainly from rents and farms, a sizeable dairy farm based on a herd of some sixty animals was maintained and doubled after 1510. Mr Denney tells us that by the end of the fifteenth century there is evidence of selective breeding by the introduction of a northern strain.



The documents selected tell us more about the economy of the estate than about the tenants. This is only to be expected, given the special characteristics of the estate. Mr Denney, quite rightly, touches only gingerly on the vexed question of the East Anglian *tenementum*. But the rent rolls printed show that quite a lot could be said about the tenants, and the detail in that of 1484 is such that a local topographer could reconstruct a convincing picture of the location of holdings in relation to the village street plan. In addition this rental distinguishes the different components of the tenant holdings, giving some idea of the piecemeal process by which they were accumulated. The court rolls, of which, apparently, there is a long series, would give evidence of the tenants' dealings in lands which are summarized in the rental. If Mr Denney decides to write the full history of the estate, the story of the tenantry, no doubt, would be an important feature of it.

Only one or two of the interesting features of these documents have been mentioned. There is much else besides, not least evidence about the monastic community, its organization, and its relations with the world around it. For a volume of 172 pages it is remarkably well packed with a wide selection of materials. It is this sort of production which makes one wish that all counties had well-supported record publishing societies.

R. H. HILTON

N. J. WILLIAMS (ed.), *Tradesmen in Early Stuart Wiltshire: A Miscellany*. Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (Records Branch), Vol. xv. 1959. xxii + 146 pp. Price to non-members 45s.

One of the most intractable problems of English economic history, and hence of agrarian history in particular, is that of measuring the direction and volume of internal trade, indeed even of discovering what things were bought and sold in particular markets. The export trades produce their shoals of documents of one sort or another; but the great mass of internal trade, far greater in volume for most commodities than the export trade, produced

little or nothing on paper. Hence historians, or students at any rate, have always tended to overestimate the importance of the commodities entering into foreign trade.

In this volume Dr Williams, now at the Public Record Office, has brought together various Exchequer records arising from the economic regulation of some retail trades by the central government. So we get "a cross-section of the Wiltshire men and women who engaged in trade in the early seventeenth century." Few butchers and bakers, woolmen and corn-dealers, escaped the record; nearly every alehouse-keeper, taverner, and inn-keeper is also named. Dr Williams's introduction is a very useful survey of the records involved and of the subject of retail trading. He raises incidentally a number of puzzling questions to which agrarian historians should be able to provide an answer: for example, if Lenten fasting was really enforced, as these records suggest it was, what did the butchers do for a living between Ash Wednesday and Easter Day if they were not also graziers? I doubt, however, if there is really a problem here. Boarding-house keepers in the holiday towns of England manage to exist for an interval of nine months every year on the spoils of three summer months. It could have been no great hardship, if any at all, for the village butcher in 1600 to tide over a space of six weeks or so, and he almost certainly turned to some other sideline. Many of them were smallholders and this interval would have enabled them to get on with their tillage. Though this volume is on the margin of agrarian history, it will be found useful in more ways than one. It should also encourage local historians in other counties to search out these Exchequer records for their own counties and towns, and local record societies to print them.

W. G. HOSKINS

GEORGE EWART EVANS, *The Horse in the Furrow*. Illustrated by C. F. Tunnicliffe. Faber & Faber, 1960. 292 pp. 25s.

No agrarian historian, British or foreign, should fail to read this book. It has a few



minor flaws. But it exemplifies the way relatively recent history should be written: in the light not just of the manuscript and printed records of the muniment-rooms and libraries, nor simply of the evidence of the landscape, but of both combined *and bound up with* the indispensable verbal testimony of those whose whole lives are a part of the subject.

Mr Ewart Evans is a free-lance writer, a Welshman who settled in Suffolk some twenty years ago and whose first book, *Ask the Fellows who Cut the Hay* (Faber, 1956), was a valuable essay in the same methods, though less impressively concentrated on a theme than the present one. His purpose here is to record the story of farming when "the horse was the pivot of the corn-husbandry" of Suffolk; and to do it while there are still people about who lived that life—quite as distinctive and odd in its way as that in a Nottingham mining village or a Fiji island tribe. But Suffolk farm-life has been transformed over the last forty years, chiefly by the internal-combustion engine, which presents less of a threat in Nottingham, and to an extent that would be disallowed as inhumane in Fiji. Mr Evans does not neglect the more primitive aspects of the old, vanishing Suffolk horse-farms. His chapter on "The Horseman's Word," by which he means the secret methods, known to one or two old horsemen in every district, of exercising 'supernatural' control over horses, demonstrates, reassuringly, the proper use of folklore by historians.

The book is in four sections. The first, and best, called "The Horseman," has chapters on "the horseman's day," "in the field," "the horseman's year," "some of the ploughs," "outside jobs," and—as instructive, surprising, and valuable as any—"the horseman's dress." This section is almost wholly reconstructed from the memories of old Suffolk farming people. Mr Evans effectively stresses rural society's concern with continuity. His information tallies with all that I myself have heard in Suffolk from such characters; and in its details of plough-teams, variations in sizes of stretch, drainage, etc., it seems to me valid material to compare with, and perhaps en-

large our understanding of, the earlier, even medieval, information. Unluckily, when he gets back into earlier periods Mr Evans makes occasional slips. For instance, on p. 40 he writes of "the old medieval system"—as though there is any likelihood that in the Middle Ages there was one farming system for the whole of Britain; and on p. 127 he reveals a very odd idea of English feudalism.

The second section, on "The Farmer," is based more on conventional nineteenth-century written records—those of the worthy Biddells of Playford—occasionally supplemented by verbal evidence. Mr Evans makes no use of other forms of written record—the equally authentic autobiographical farming trilogy of Adrian Bell, or the Suffolk novels of H. W. Freeman. But, like Dr Thirsk and Miss Imray, in Vol. 1 of the Suffolk Records Society, he draws to great advantage upon the Biddells' 'day-books' and 'field-books'; here it is a pity there are no cross-references, especially to the Biddells' schedules of cropping reproduced in that Society's volume. Mr Evans scores high by using the 'work-books' as well, and notably by bringing out their evidence that harvesting was by no means the only "taken" (i.e. contracted) work, that in the early nineteenth century on the Biddells' farm "a large proportion of all work was contracted for" between farmer and labourers. The first two sections admirably emphasize the point made in Adrian Bell's *Corduroy* that farm work needs a high degree of accuracy and finish, as much as any of the more celebrated skilled crafts. This has been recognized only too late.

The third section is devoted to "The Horse," a history of the famous Suffolk horses, with detailed chapters on the Suffolk Horse Society, the Blacksmith, the Harness-maker, and so on. Mr Evans mentions the use of ox-teams as late as our own century, and refers to horse-teams operating in Norfolk as early as the fifteenth century. He evidently did not know the reference to a Suffolk plough-team of eight horses as early as the 1190's. The fourth section, "Folklore," an eye-opener to the conventional historian,

completes a most remarkable book, and ends with a plea: "One conviction kept obtruding itself upon the writer while he was collecting the material for this book: 'you are only touching the fringe of the work that needs doing.' This is the sort of inquiry that should be conducted by a team, backed by a university and having considerable resources at its disposal. . . Dr W. G. Hoskins of Oxford . . . has started a vigorous school of open-air historians who are as much concerned with the actual physical area studied as they are with the books and documents concerning it in the libraries. This type of approach, extended to embrace the oral tradition and conducted by a team organized by a single university or school of studies, is most likely to be fruitful in East Anglia or any other homogeneous region."

Mr Tunncliffe's drawings illustrate the text with depth and feeling.

NORMAN SCARFE

J. P. T. BURY (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. x, *The Zenith of European Power, 1830-70*. Cambridge University Press, 1960. 766 pp. 40s.

Two questions will immediately occur to any reader of this journal who is a potential reader of this book. What is there here for the student of agricultural history? And what is new about this 'New' Cambridge Modern History? The answer to the first question is: very little. Professor Herbert Heaton devotes four or five pages of his chapter on Economic Change and Growth to discussing agriculture in terms of the increasing commercial character of farming, improvement in methods, and the greater dependence on capital. This, virtually all there is on agriculture, is well put, but inevitably is very familiar. The second question invites comparison with Volume xi—*The Growth of Nationalities*—of *The Cambridge Modern History*, planned by Lord Acton, and first published in 1909. Mr Bury's book comes out well by this test. Though it was Lord Acton who enjoined historians to study problems not periods, it is Mr Bury's mainly Anglo-American team, not Lord Acton's

European team, who more nearly practise his precept. Furthermore, this particular volume has a unity which its predecessor, and some of the recent co-volumes in the new series, lacks. Unity probably springs from tighter editorial control—the older work had three editors—and the deliberate choice of a better unifying theme. To consider the age as "The Zenith of European Power" gives a coherence and cohesion that "The Growth of Nationalities" certainly did not, and perhaps could not, have—though it is ironic that a volume with such a sub-title has only one contributor from mainland Europe. This is an admirable book.

PETER LYON

J. FREDERICK REES (ed.), *The Cardiff Region, A Survey*. University of Wales Press, 1960. xvi+222 pp., illustrated. 21s.

Not the least of the many benefits which have accrued from the annual meetings of the British Association in the post-war period have been substantial contributions to our knowledge of regional contrasts in Great Britain. The survey produced for the Cardiff meeting is a worthy addition to this series, yet one which avoids the danger of falling into an over-stereotyped pattern.

Unlike some recent volumes, it devotes less attention to the host city than to the surrounding "region," here defined for convenience as east Glamorgan, the whole of Monmouthshire, and part of Breconshire. Following the usual pattern, special attention has been paid to the landscape, climate, geology, botany, zoology, historical development, and economic structure of the area, as well as the educational institutions of Cardiff. But, as if to help narrow the gap between scientists and literary intellectuals, the volume also includes substantial contributions on the Welsh language, local place-names, and the Latin, Welsh, and English literary traditions of the area. The result is a well-proportioned introduction to the diversities that one delights to find in a borderland.

Fewer than two per cent of the insured population are employed in agriculture, yet industrialism is confined to relatively small

pockets. Even on the coalfield, ridges of Penant Sandstone have prevented the development of those drab expanses of industrial houses so characteristic of northern England. And if in the "valleys" the rivers are coal-black, many a coal-tip is now "silver with Moonshine (*Anaphalis margaritacea*)."

Close at hand the pole-cat, otter, and red squirrel are still to be found. Maps, diagrams, and photographs in keeping with the high technical standards of the University of Wales Press add to the wealth of description.

English readers would have gained if, in the evocative sections describing physical make-up and especially plant-cover, the more characteristic elements of Welsh toponymy had been explained. Rather oddly, we are twice informed in the geology section that the name Cefn Onn is mis-spelt on the Ordnance Map but are not once given the meaning of the name—Ash Ridge—which has some significant ecological implications. Students of agrarian history too may feel that more could have been written of the changes in land ownership and occupancy which accompanied industrialization. Enclosure for minerals, inflated charges for the renewal of mineral leases, and the way of life of smallholder-miners are topics that spring readily to mind. These omissions were perhaps dictated by pressure of space, but more disappointing is an error of commission in the section on early history, especially since the survey endeavours to record not only the changes which have occurred in the area but also changes in "our detailed knowledge of it." Yet there is little echo here of the stimulating debate on the survival of British villages in the lowlands of Anglo-Saxon England. Even in the Vale of Glamorgan, the Welsh are dismissed as mobile tribal groups practising a pastoral economy. We are encouraged to believe that Norman feudal lord and Saxon peasant were the first to make substantial advance into the arable potentiality of the Vale as late as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Nevertheless items mentioned elsewhere in this volume point to a quite different interpretation. Was not some territorialization of power, a con-

comitant of arable farming, necessary in the Dark Ages to permit of exotic imports into Dinas Powis from as far afield as the Mediterranean? Celtic saints doubtless sought "a solitude," but they neither wished to fast to death there nor yet to feed themselves unaided. For this reason, these zealots little approved of wandering souls; and the cultivated fields adjoining St Illtud's monastic settlement at Llantwit Major occupied some of the richest land in a lime-rich Vale. Under such circumstances it is hardly likely that nucleated hamlets like Llanbethery, whose remaining open fields in 1840 are well illustrated in another section of the volume, were late Saxon or Norman creations. Yet such hamlets are, or at least were, everywhere characteristic of the lowlands of the area.

If in this particular respect an opportunity has been missed, nevertheless the volume as a whole is a faithful mirror of the area. Besides fulfilling its primary purpose of serving the scientific visitor, it will remain an indispensable handbook for serious students of this borderland.

GLANVILLE R. J. JONES

T. S. ASHTON, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800*. Oxford University Press, 1959. viii + 200 pp. 21s.

Professor Ashton believes that "Historians, their eyes on the long-term movements that transformed economic and social life at this period, have paid insufficient attention to short-term fluctuations." It is the short-term fluctuations that Professor Ashton seeks to detect and to explain. Agricultural historians must be primarily concerned, on the other hand, with long-term fluctuations; they must ask themselves why agricultural productivity tended to increase in the eighteenth century. Professor Ashton, in this excellent book, is not concerned with giving answers to this question. His concern with agricultural fluctuations is with the short-term ones alone: their explanation is, of course, quite simply, in the fluctuations from year to year in the weather and in the consequences on harvests. His concern with agriculture is thus limited almost

entirely to the effects of good and bad harvests on other sections of the economy. Farmers and landowners believed that what was good for them was good for the country, that high agricultural prices increased incomes so as to stimulate demand for other products and to provide general prosperity. They found, given the inelastic demand for agricultural produce, that bad harvests gave them higher profits than good ones. Bad harvests, therefore, were good for the economy as a whole.

Professor Ashton remarks that "the weight of evidence, however, is against this thesis." Farmers who normally produced a small surplus or only enough for their families suffered in time of dearth; large-scale farmers, while doing well when grain prices were high, might be able to make up for losses from low grain prices by increased receipts from animal products, the demand for which was more elastic than for grain. An abundant harvest called for additional labour and this put more money into the pockets of casual labourers by whom it was quickly spent. Furthermore, demand for consumer goods increased when harvests were good, because wage-earners had more left over after buying

necessary food. Again, in years of scarcity, exports fell and the flow of money into the country was reduced. The value of sterling therefore fell, and in war-time the cost of maintaining British armies abroad and of subsidizing foreign allies increased correspondingly. "Government deficits arising from such conditions tended to raise the cost of borrowing and to reduce confidence."

Professor Ashton observes that fluctuations in economic activity were more frequent and shorter in duration in the eighteenth than in the nineteenth century. This was primarily caused by the dominance of English agriculture in the economy. In the nineteenth century its dominance was weakened by imports and dearths were therefore shorter and less acute; in the eighteenth century, bad harvests were able to halt upward movements of economic activity.

The setting out of these arguments takes up a very small space in this book. A brief review in a periodical devoted to agricultural history cannot indicate the wide range of topics examined or pay adequate tribute to the skill with which they are discussed.

R. A. C. PARKER

## Books Received

JAMES PIERCE CAVIN, *Economics for Agriculture*: selected writings of John D. Black. Harvard University Press, 1959. 720 pp. 96s.

J. A. FABER and OTHERS, *Het Aantekeningenboek van Dirck Jansz.* Frysk Ynstitut, Grins, 1960. 120 pp. (duplicated). No price stated.

B. K. NARAYAN, *Agricultural Development in Hyderabad State, 1900-1956*. Keshav Prakashan, Secunderabad, 1960. 116 pp. 5 rupees.

ANDREAS ROPEID, *Skav—ein studie i eldretids for-problem* (with English summary). Universitetsforlaget, Oslo/Bergen, 1960. 388 pp., illus. 14.50 kroner.

HILMAR STIGUM, *Norsk Bondeliv, 1550-1850*. Landbrugsmuseet, Copenhagen, 1960, illus. No price stated.

B. H. SLICHER VAN BATH, *The influence of economic conditions on the development of agricultural tools and machines in history*. North-Holland Publishing Co., Amsterdam. 36 pp. No price stated.

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